

# THE VIRTUE OF TEMPERANCE

*The Christian Teachings of Virtue (Series 5, Part 7, Teaching #39)*

**Instructions:** Read aloud, underline what stands out to you most, discuss



**Leader Guide...**

See the back page for  
detailed facilitator  
instructions.

The protector of purity and custodian of balance is temperance.

*The virtue of temperance enables one to moderate desires and temptations.*

Temperance is the last of the seven chief virtues and completes the cardinal virtues, following prudence, justice, and fortitude. It is the virtue that perfects the passions of the lower faculties and the “appetites of the soul.” Where fortitude strengthens the soul in the face of trial, temperance strengthens it in the face of temptation—keeping the soul from being ruled by impulse and preserving the purity of the moral life.

Temperance is the virtue of self-mastery—the habit of rightly ordering desires, moderating pleasures, and restraining excess so that the soul remains free to pursue what is truly good. It is not the rejection of pleasure, nor is it a life of harsh strictness; rather, temperance ensures that pleasure serves the soul rather than enslaving it. It allows you to enjoy life’s blessings without being controlled by them, ensuring that emotions, appetites, and desires are ruled by reason rather than ruling over it.

Just as a charioteer must keep a firm yet measured hold on the reins, temperance governs the passions—making sure neither indulgence nor deprivation derails the soul from its course. If the reins are too loose, the horses run wild in reckless excess; if pulled too tightly, the chariot grinds to a halt in unnecessary rigidity. But with temperance, the reins are held in perfect tension—the passions are not denied, but directed; the desires are not destroyed, but disciplined.

Unlike worldly restraint, which often stems from fear, vanity, or pride, true temperance—for the faithful—is a supernatural grace that aligns the soul with God’s divine order. Left unchecked, human desires—whether for food, drink, comfort, pleasure, or recognition—quickly become disordered, leading to excess, addiction, or idolatry. But through temperance, those same desires are rightly ordered, allowing you to live in harmony with both body and soul—experiencing joy without excess and sacrifice without bitterness.

“Moderation is necessary in all things, except in our love of God” (St. Teresa of Ávila). This is why Scripture calls for self-discipline, reminding us, “Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one” (1 Corinthians 9:25). Temperance is not about denying yourself happiness—but about pursuing the lasting joy that only comes when desire is subjected to truth.

## 7 Chief Virtues

Faith

Hope

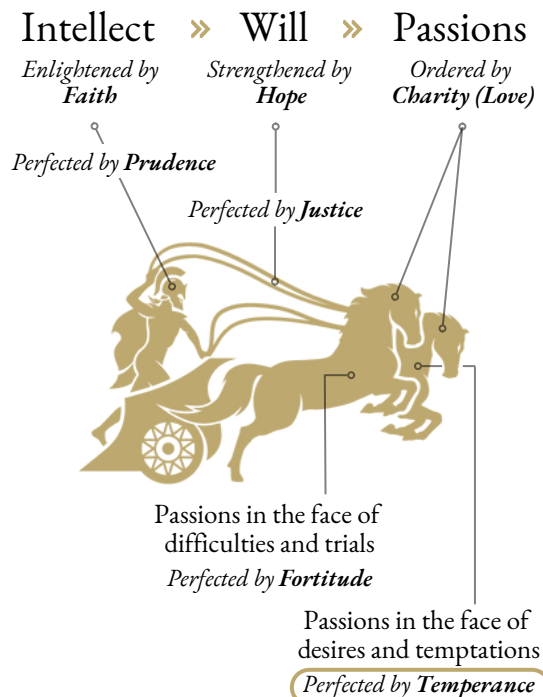
Charity

Prudence

Justice

Fortitude

Temperance



**Continue Learning:** Scan the QR code to access the video for this teaching as well as additional resources such as related Scripture, quotes, and more.

Or, visit [horseandchariot.com/the-virtue-of-temperance](https://horseandchariot.com/the-virtue-of-temperance)



Temperance is upheld by the pillar virtues of orderliness, discipline, and self-control. Upon these pillars, temperance stands, enabling one to moderate desires and temptations. Without all three, temperance implodes.

*The virtue of orderliness* enables one to moderate disorder. It ensures temperance is not chaotic or unbalanced but structured and measured, making sure time, priorities, and surroundings remain in harmony rather than falling into a neglectful mess. The orderly tend to maintain clean spaces, complete their tasks on time, and keep their responsibilities in order. Without orderliness, life falls into disarray—where impulse reigns over intention and distraction clouds purpose. Its sub-virtues include wholesomeness, cleanliness, organization, prioritization, preparedness, promptness, and efficiency.

*The virtue of discipline* enables one to moderate deficiency. It ensures temperance is not weak but strengthened by habit, preventing laziness and inconsistency from leading the soul astray. The disciplined do not wait for motivation to do what is right—they train themselves to resist complacency, to develop self-drive, and to persevere in virtue even when it is difficult.

Just as a charioteer must train the horses for endurance, so too must the one with temperance train the will to resist slothfulness. Without discipline, virtue is abandoned when it becomes inconvenient, and inner drive is lost to indolence. Its sub-virtues include initiative, effort, enthusiasm, positivity, outgoingness, consistency, and diligence.

*The virtue of self-control* enables one to moderate excess. It ensures pleasure serves the soul rather than enslaves it—preventing desires from growing out of control, overpowering reason, and leading to addiction or vice. One with self-control does not deny pleasure entirely but ensures pleasure remains a servant, not a master. Just as a charioteer must hold the reins firmly, allowing the horses to run without losing control, so too must the one with temperance govern the passions—allowing enjoyment without excess, desire without disorder, and fulfillment without ruin. Without self-control, the passions run wild, leading the soul into indulgence, wastefulness, and sin. Its sub-virtues include abstinence, sobriety, chastity, honesty, humor, modesty, and—fittingly—the last of all the virtues, but by no means the least: humility.

These pillars form the foundation of temperance. To live in temperance is to live in freedom—where desires no longer rule the soul, but serve it as powerful forces for good. It is the balance of body and spirit, the harmony of passion and reason, the mastery of self that leads to a life of virtue and fulfillment in Christ.

Without temperance, one either lives so loosely that they chase every indulgence, or so rigidly that life becomes unbearable. But one who upholds temperance rightly directs their passions with wisdom—ensuring that neither excess nor deficiency hinders the pursuit of the good.



Temperance is the grace-filled strength that keeps desire in its proper place, allowing you to enjoy the good without being mastered by it. In a culture that idolizes indulgence and constant stimulation, temperance invites you into something deeper: self-possession, inner peace, and the freedom to choose what is good over what merely feels good. It is the art of living with discipline, dignity, and devotion to God.

One with temperance guides their lower faculties by virtue. They eat without gluttony, rest without laziness, and enjoy pleasure without being consumed by it. Their speech is measured, their eyes controlled, and their habits formed by wisdom, not whim. The temperate walk the narrow path of moderation, where their desires do not rule them, their impulses do not drive them, and their appetites do not lead them astray. Their passions serve them—and the Lord—not the other way around.

Temperance looks like the one who is satisfied with enough rather than craving more. It looks like the man who bounces his eyes away from sexual images, the woman who dresses with class rather than seeking lustful attention, and the person who exercises and eats healthily without obsession. It is found in the student who stays focused on classwork instead of scrolling endlessly, the friend who listens before responding, and the worker who knows when to labor and when to rest.

Temperance is Joseph fleeing from temptation, Daniel refusing the king's indulgent food, and Susanna refusing to compromise her purity. It is the rich young man being challenged to let go of his wealth, John the Baptist living simply in the wilderness, and Mary embracing God's will with humility rather than grasping for self-honor. Above all, it is Jesus Himself, who fasted in the desert, resisting Satan's temptations—showing that true temperance is not just about rightly ordered moderation, but about living in full obedience to God.

Temperance is the quiet victory of grace over impulse, of love over lust, and of purpose over pleasure. It doesn't shout, but it endures. It doesn't shine in the spotlight, but it holds steady in the shadows. In a disordered world, the temperate soul stands as a witness to the beauty of balance—a life governed not by craving, but by Christ. And in that mastery, there is peace.

## TEMPERANCE IN ACTION: PERSONAL CHECKLIST

- ☐ *I say "no" to excess and "yes" to what is good and needed.*
- ☐ *I practice moderation in food, drink, and entertainment.*
- ☐ *I bounce my eyes, mind, and heart from lustful or impure content.*
- ☐ *I rest without laziness and work without obsession.*
- ☐ *I speak with thoughtfulness, not out of impulse or emotion.*
- ☐ *I choose to fast or abstain regularly as a spiritual discipline.*
- ☐ *I control my impulses and submit them to God's will.*
- ☐ *I use technology intentionally, rather than letting it control me.*
- ☐ *I avoid emotional extremes and seek inner peace through virtue.*
- ☐ *I strive to be satisfied with enough, rather than always wanting more.*

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**TEMPERANCE IN ACTION:** *Select 1-3 areas you'd like to take action most in your life.*

*I endeavor to put my temperance into action by...*

- ☐ *Saying "no" to excess and "yes" to what is good and needed.*
- ☐ *Practicing moderation in food, drink, and entertainment.*
- ☐ *Immediately bouncing my eyes, mind, and heart from lustful or impure content.*
- ☐ *Resting without laziness and working without obsession.*
- ☐ *Speaking with thoughtfulness, not out of impulse or emotion.*
- ☐ *Choosing to fast or abstain regularly as a spiritual discipline.*
- ☐ *Controlling my impulses and submitting them to God's will.*
- ☐ *Using technology intentionally, rather than letting it control me.*
- ☐ *Avoiding emotional extremes and seeking inner peace through virtue.*
- ☐ *Striving to be satisfied with enough, rather than always wanting more.*

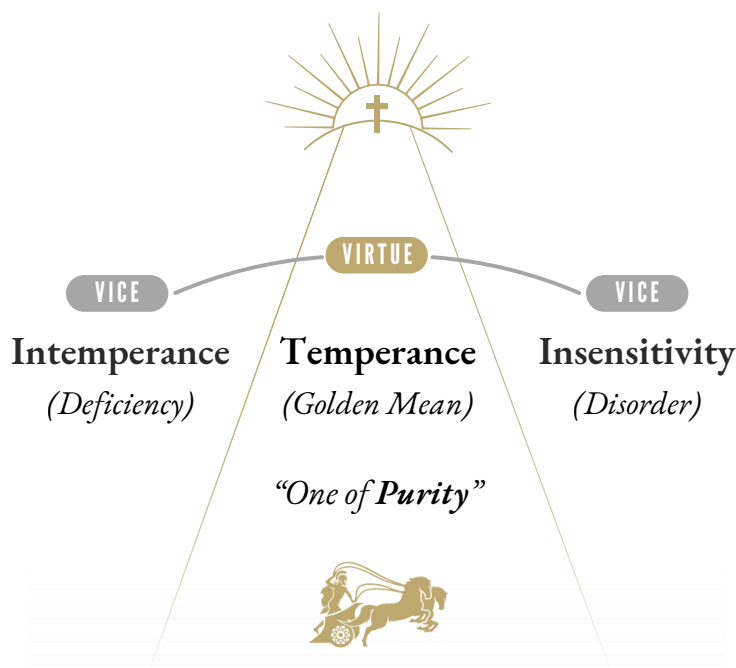
The vices opposed to temperance are, at one extreme, a deficiency of temperance—which is intemperance, and at the other extreme, one can never have too much temperance, but one can have disordered temperance—which is insensitivity.

*The vice of intemperance* is a disposition of excessive indulgence void of moderation or restraint. The intemperate soul is ruled by its desires, allowing pleasure to dictate their actions rather than reason and virtue. It is found in the one who overeats or drinks beyond need, in the person who indulges in lustful acts without regard for purity, and in the individual who seeks constant entertainment to avoid self-discipline. Intemperance enslaves the soul, making it a prisoner to fleeting pleasures while eroding its capacity for self-mastery and true fulfillment.

*The vice of insensitivity* is a disposition of excessive strictness, even when counter to what is good. The insensitive soul rejects legitimate pleasure, treating all enjoyment with suspicion and suppressing even what is rightly ordered. It is found in the one who denies themselves necessary rest, in the person who views all physical pleasure as sinful, and in the overly rigid who reject joy as weakness rather than as a gift from God. Insensitivity distorts temperance, replacing self-mastery with self-deprivation for its own sake, ensuring discipline serves pride rather than fullness.

Both intemperance and insensitivity thwart the virtue of temperance—one by surrendering to excess, the other by rejecting even what is good. Together, they lead the soul away from balance, either into indulgence that weakens the will or into severity that drains the joy from life, both of which separate it from the freedom true temperance provides.

Thus, whether it be by intemperance or insensitivity, the outcome is the same—impurity. The impurity of desire, the corruption of balance, and the distortion of human freedom. Impurity, in the broad sense of moral life, gives rise to sins such as gluttony, lust, drunkenness, sloth, and harsh disdain for rightful pleasure. It severs the soul from grace, leaving it either enslaved to excess or imprisoned by rigidity. Hence, it is written, “Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites” (Sirach 18:30), for to abandon temperance is to forsake the harmony of the soul and to live, not in liberty, but in bondage to the very desires one refuses to master.



The best defense against impurity and the vices opposed to temperance is to develop temperance itself. And temperance is not merely about moderation—it is about freedom. The one who lacks temperance believes they are free when, in reality, they are enslaved. Enslaved to cravings they cannot resist. Enslaved to habits that control them. Enslaved to desires that pull them downward instead of lifting them up. The temperate do not live this way. They master their appetites, so their appetites do not master them. They rule their desires, so their desires do not rule them. They live with balance, so no indulgence clouds their mind, weakens their will, or takes the place of what truly satisfies.

Where have you lost temperance? Where have desires dictated your actions instead of reason and virtue? Where has order turned to disorder? For some, it is food or alcohol—overeating for comfort, drinking for escape. For others, it is technology—scrolling endlessly, consuming content instead of living with purpose. Some are ruled by laziness, putting off responsibility for another day, another hour, another moment. Some are ruled by restlessness, incapable of silence, incapable of stillness, always needing more.

And for many, it is lust. The wandering eyes. The secret glances. The quiet indulgence in images and fantasies that stain the soul. Lust whispers, “It is harmless. It is natural. It is no great sin.” But lust is never harmless. It darkens the mind, weakens the will, and distorts the way one sees others. It turns bodies into objects rather than brothers and sisters in Christ. It trains the soul to consume rather than to love. It poisons purity, leaving the soul restless, unsatisfied, and distant from grace.

It is said, “For every great temptation, there will be many small ones. Wolves and bears are more dangerous than flies, but we are bothered most by flies” (St. Francis de Sales). Hence, temperance must be cultivated in small, daily victories long before it is displayed in great acts of restraint. It is found in the one who eats with moderation instead of mindless indulgence. It is found in the one who puts the device down instead of wasting another hour. It is found in the one who trains their eyes to see rightly, their mind to think rightly, and their body to act rightly. The temperate do not reject the gifts of life—they receive them rightly, enjoy them rightly, and let them go when the time is right.

Temperance begins with the recognition that it is utterly impossible without God’s help. Daily prayer, Scripture, and reflection are essential. The soul cannot master itself apart from grace. Prayer aligns the will with God’s, giving strength to resist temptations and reorder desires. Scripture renews the mind, teaching the soul to value eternal things over fleeting pleasures, for “Whoever is faithful in very little is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10). Reflection challenges the soul to confront its imbalances with honesty, inspiring repentance and renewal. Without these spiritual practices, the pursuit of temperance becomes mere willpower, which will falter. But with them, the soul finds both the strength and clarity to live in harmony with God’s design.

As temperance grows, it purifies the soul. The indulgent become measured. The restless become still. The impulsive become disciplined. The lustful become pure. The one who once lived for excess now thrives in balance. The one who once followed every craving now walks in mastery. The one who once felt powerless against temptation now possesses the strength to say no, to step away, and to live freely. They do not fear desire, nor do they worship it—they have placed it in its rightful place.

Ultimately, temperance is the virtue that preserves freedom and breeds purity. It cleans the dirty waters of the soul so the light of Christ shines through without distortion. It allows the soul to rise above momentary cravings and pursue the only pleasure that will never fade—the eternal joy of communion with God.



Seeker of virtue, the way of temperance is the path of self-mastery, where every passion, every appetite, and every desire must be brought under control. Temperance is not simply restraint—it is the art of ordering your soul, of choosing what is best over what is easy, and of ruling your desires. If you choose this path, “Expect temptation to your last breath” (St. Anthony the Great), and always be prepared for battle—for the greatest enemy you will face is yourself.

At first, temperance may feel simple: eat in moderation, avoid excess, and practice discipline. But soon, the deeper struggles will emerge. You will experience the pull of pleasure, the temptation to indulge, and the craving for comfort that dulls your will. Your impulses will rebel against you. The world will tell you that denying yourself is foolish, that excess is freedom, and that indulgence is happiness. You will see others give in to their passions without shame, and you will be tempted to do the same. At times, your desires will feel too strong, your will too weak. You will fail. And when you do, you will be tempted to think that self-mastery is impossible—that purity is a myth.

But if you hang in there, if you continue to fight the good fight, something remarkable will happen: temperance. Just as the greatest warrior bears the most scars, the marks of your past will not tell the story of a believer defeated by sin, but of one who never stopped fighting to break free from it. For when temperance rises—once and for all—from weakness to strength, from victim to victor over temptation, it becomes liberating. It will not only teach you to say no to excess but will also free you to say yes to what is truly good. You will learn that freedom is not found in indulgence, but in control—and that true joy comes not from excess but from balance. You will discover that pleasure is a servant, not a master, and that desires are meant to be guided, not obeyed. With temperance, you will no longer be a slave to your cravings, your impulses, or your passions—you will be their master.

Temperance requires discipline, patience, and a relentless pursuit of purity. It will cost you your laziness, your gluttony, your excuses. But it will give you everything—clarity of mind, strength of will, and peace of soul. Make it a habit to “sow acts of [righteous] self-denial and you will reap a harvest of character” (St. Josemaría Escrivá).

You can do this. Not by your own power, but by His. By grace. The path of temperance is long and challenging, but it leads to true freedom and holiness. You’re not alone. Lift the sails of your soul so the Holy Spirit can fill you, and the winds of grace can move you to—take control, tame your appetites, and master your desires. So in the end, you may stand with a clear conscience and carry no impure vice unto death.

This teaching on temperance calls every Christian to embrace a life of balance, purity, and self-mastery—where desires are disciplined, pleasures are ordered, and the soul is freed to follow Christ without restraint.

**1. Live with mastery over appetite.** Temperance does not reject pleasure—but places it in service of virtue. → Do you let your cravings dictate your choices, or do you rule over your desires with wisdom?

**2. Pursue holiness, not indulgence.** True joy is not found in excess but in ordered desire. → Do your daily habits lead you toward God—or pull you away through distraction and overconsumption?

**3. Use moderation as a spiritual discipline.** Temperance is the training ground for inner freedom. → Do you practice restraint in small things so you're prepared for big temptations?

**4. Value purity of heart.** Temperance purifies your thoughts, words, and actions. → Are you guarding your eyes, your mind, and your body from that which defiles the soul?

**5. Reject both indulgence and rigidity.** Temperance is not self-denial for its own sake—but love in right order. → Are you avoiding joy out of pride, or embracing pleasure without virtue?

**6. Strengthen your soul through simplicity.** Temperance thrives when life is ordered around what truly matters. → Are you decluttering your soul—removing what distracts, so you can focus on what sanctifies?

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FAITHFUL

A Christian governed by temperance exhibits restraint, clarity, and spiritual strength:

**1. Disciplined.** They live intentionally, not impulsively.

**2. Balanced.** They enjoy good things without being mastered by them.

**3. Pure.** Their heart is clean, their mind is calm, and their eyes are guarded.

**4. Orderly.** They keep their surroundings, responsibilities, and priorities, in proper order.

**5. Focused.** They prioritize God's will over fleeting comfort or pleasure.

**6. Free.** They are not slaves to habit, appetite, or passion.

### Signs of struggling in temperance...

- Consistently giving in to cravings, impulses, or emotions
- Justifying sin or excess in the name of "freedom" or "enjoyment"
- Swinging between extremes—overindulgence and rigid denial
- Letting entertainment, food, or lust control attention
- Struggling to fast, wait, or endure minor discomforts
- Speaking impulsively, overreacting, or living without rest
- Believing pleasure is wrong in itself, viewing joy with suspicion

**Think:** Temperance teaches me to master my desires so they serve, not rule me. It calls me to bring order to my soul, freeing me from excess and helping me live with clarity, balance, and peace. With God's grace, I choose what is good over what merely feels good, walking in freedom, purity, and joyful self-control.

**Pray:** Lord, give me mastery over my desires—not to suppress them, but to direct them in love toward what is true, good, and holy. Teach me to enjoy life's blessings without being ruled by them. Let my eyes be pure, my hands be clean, and my habits be formed in virtue. Where I am weak, give me grace. Where I lack discipline, give me strength. May temperance reign in my soul—not by force, but by the freedom of Your Spirit living in me. Amen.



SELF-EVALUATION & ACTION STEP										
<b>Rate yourself from 1-10</b> 1 = I struggle to consistently live a life of temperance 10 = I consider temperance one of my strengths	1	2	3	4	<del>5</del>	6	7	8	9	10
	Struggle ←				(avoid 5)	→ Strength				
<b>Why did you give yourself this rating?</b> (In what areas do you struggle the most?)										
<b>What benefits will you obtain from raising your rating?</b> (consider all aspects of your life)										
<b>Of the opposing vices of intemperance and insensitivity, which one do you wrestle with the most and why?</b>										
<b>Of the pillar virtues of orderliness, discipline, and self-control, which one are you the strongest and which one needs the most development?</b>										
<b>Of the areas you underlined throughout this teaching, which stood out to you most and why?</b>										
<b>What specific action step will you take this week to grow in the virtue of temperance?</b>										
<b>Daily Affirmation:</b> Today, by God's grace, I rule over my desires. I choose moderation over excess, live with purity, and choose virtue over vice.										

## NOTES

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## FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

### Courageous Facilitator,

Your willingness to step forward and lead is a gift of grace to your community and a brave act of faith. God bless you for answering the call to inspire others to grow in virtue and pursue the character of Christ.

The Holy Spirit thrives in fellowship and community, working powerfully through the connections and shared experiences of small groups. That's why these lesson plans are designed to cultivate genuine relationships, inspire meaningful conversations, and foster a spirit of transformation through shared wisdom and grace.

Facilitating these lessons is both simple and impactful. While many forms of teaching rely on one-way communication, where one person speaks and others listen, true transformation happens through two-way communication. In this format, ideas aren't merely taught—they're explored together. You'll guide, but everyone will share and learn from one another, creating a rich environment where the Holy Spirit can move and grow each mind, heart, and soul.

These lesson plans succeed because they:

- **Encourage connection** in a collaborative small group setting that fosters action and accountability
- **Empower every voice** with opportunities for each participant to share and contribute
- **Inspire growth** through educational, inspirational, and transformational teachings

Your role as a facilitator is to:

- **Follow the instructions and trust the process**—the wheel is already built, you're here to guide it.
- **Honor the schedule** by being punctual and respecting the time of your group.
- **Lead with love** and rely on God's grace to inspire, guide, and uplift everyone in the group.

Your courage to create a space for growth and fellowship will not only bless others but will deepen your own journey of faith and virtue. Together, with God's help, lives will be transformed.

*To God be the glory!*

## FACILITATOR CHECKLIST

*Note: Because this is a longer teaching, consider sending it to the group in advance so they can reflect more deeply and come prepared to discuss.*

### 1. Getting Started (5-10 mins)

- ☐ Give everyone a few minutes to join before getting started. Be friendly and greet people as they arrive. Get them talking! Come prepared with some good ice-breaker questions you can ask during this time.
- ☐ 3-5 minutes in, do quick introductions for anyone new to the group. What brought them to the group? Spend a moment getting to know them.
- ☐ Open with a short prayer (facilitator or volunteer).

### 2. Watch or Read the Teaching (15-20 mins)

- ☐ To stay within the allotted time, either watch the video of the teaching as a group (if video available) OR have a volunteer read each page aloud.
- ☐ Have everyone note what stands out to them most.

### 3. How it Applies (5-10 mins)

- ☐ Have a volunteer read all of page 8. Have others follow along and underline what stands out to them most.

### 4. Reflection & Discussion (15-20 mins)

- ☐ Have everyone quietly take 5 minutes to complete the "Self-Evaluation & Action Step" on page 9.
- ☐ Then, going around the group, have each person take a minute to share what stood out to them most about the teaching and why.
- ☐ If time allows, continue the discussion using the remaining self-evaluation questions as a guide.

### 5. Wrap Up (5 mins)

- ☐ Remind everyone to do the daily affirmation until you meet again next time.
- ☐ Ask for any prayer requests from the group.
- ☐ Close with a short prayer (facilitator or volunteer).