

There is a practice developed by St. Augustine. In his autobiography he tell us that as a young man he had difficulties restraining his lust and prayed, 'Give me chastity and continence, but not yet'. An honest confession indeed! There are four parts: can ought, want and will.

We might sometimes fool ourselves and say we cannot give up tea or coffee. But when we look a little closer this is usually 'won't'. So the first step is to speak gently to ourselves directly into our own hearts, 'I can refrain ... for my own benefit and the benefit of others'. And when we feel we have digested that ability, we then accept full responsibility, 'I ought to refrain ... for my own benefit and the benefit of others'. Now we can bring up the desire in the heart: 'I want to refrain ... for my own benefit and the benefit of others'. And by way of encouragement, we can bring to mind the benefits of such restraint. And then we are ready to make an act will: 'I will refrain ... for my own benefit and the benefit of others'.

It is the same practice to develop a virtue. I can, ought, want and will develop strong resolve.

I find this best done after the morning sit and before I sleep. I think you will find it surprising effective if it becomes an everyday practice.