

## The Wisdom Page

### **Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength by Roy Baumeister and John Tierney**

Reviewed by Tom Lombardo

*"Until fairly recently, most people relied on a traditional method for maintaining self-control: They outsourced the job to God." Roy Baumeister and John Tierney*

*Willpower* is a great book--the best non-fiction book I have read this year. Baumeister and Tierney argue at the onset that willpower or self-control is one of the two psychological variables most predictive of success in life (the other being intelligence). (And the evidence I have read, through a variety of sources, is that the former is a better predictor than the latter.)

From this opening argument, the authors next develop a general theory of willpower, backed by a huge amount of psychological research. Central to their theory is the hypothesis that willpower is a psychological resource of which we have only so much on a given day, and hence, we can and do use it up as the day progresses, putting us in "ego depleted" states.

But just as importantly, like the muscles of our body, we can exercise our self-control, making it more effective and powerful over time. The authors, drawing on empirical research, as well as fascinating biographical accounts of individuals such as Benjamin Franklin and Henry Morton Stanley, among others, explain a variety of ways to conserve willpower, to use it wisely, and to strengthen it.

Just as importantly, the authors make a strong connection between self-control and moral character (for one of the most commonly reported uses of willpower is the ongoing resistance of temptations and personal vices). As I have argued, [self-responsibility](#) is the foundational character virtue, for without it, one cannot develop any of the other virtues; Baumeister and Tierney similarly pivot the whole issue of character development on self-control.

*Willpower* is filled with numerous fascinating and eye-opening insights and ideas, critical to the challenge of heightening future consciousness and the development of the character virtue of wisdom. How can we control our thoughts--the flow of our consciousness? Why is it important to focus on "lofty thoughts"? Why is the pursuit of increasing self-esteem the wrong way to go? Are we psychologically and ethically evolving? How so?

The authors begin their book with a quote from Charles Darwin, "The highest possible stage in moral culture is when we recognize that we ought to control our thoughts." Yes indeed. Read *Willpower*. This is what it's all about.