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BOUNDARIES

How to Set Them—How to Keep Them

KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY



THE LINDELL KEYS FOR RECOVERY HANDBOOK

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The Counseling and Coaching Series

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Personal Note 1

Introduction 3

Definitions

What Are Boundaries? 11

What Is the Purpose of Personal Boundaries? 15

What Are the Benefits of Personal Boundaries? 17

What Is God’s Heart on Boundaries? 22

Characteristics

What Distinguishes Bad Boundaries from Beneficial Boundaries? 28

What Indicates Broken Boundaries? 32

What Are Signs of Crossed Boundaries? 34

What Connects Codependency to Boundaries? 36

What Repercussions Result from Resisting Boundaries? 38

Causes

What Experiences Help Us Learn Boundaries? 46

What Is the Process of Learning Boundaries As a Child? 48

What Are Five Biblical Truths about Boundaries? 50

What Is the Root Cause of Bad Boundaries? 54

What Is God’s Ultimate Boundary? 57

Steps to Solution

Key Verse to Memorize	63
Key Passage to Read	64
How to Have a Transformed Life	67
How to Build Healthy Boundaries	74
How to Practice Parental Boundaries	81
How to Communicate Boundary Changes.....	85
How to Respond When Boundary Lines Are Crossed	89
How to Maintain Your Boundaries.....	92
Frequently Asked Questions	95

Scriptures to Memorize.....

99

Endnotes & Bibliography.....

105

A PERSONAL NOTE

from Mike Lindell

My passion is to see people recover from addiction! And that's why I'm proud to partner with author June Hunt and Hope for the Heart, and so excited to use the *Keys for Living* as part of the Lindell Recovery Network. People everywhere are struggling with addictions, wounds, and challenges in life. They need hope. They need help. And the *Keys for Living* provide that hope and real answers from God's Word.

This is the best material I've seen in biblical counseling and caregiving . . . with over 100 topics that speak to almost every presenting problem. There's nothing else like them. They take God's Word and apply it to life's challenges.

The *Keys for Living* are exceptional and outstanding resources for those who need help in overcoming the obstacles they face, and above all, to find Christ.

Read this book. Share it with others. Ask God in prayer to make it real in your life.

May God bless you as you do it!



Mike Lindell

Lindell Recovery Network

INTRODUCTION

Learning boundaries—specifically how to establish and maintain healthy boundaries has been very hard for me. For some of us, relationship boundaries are especially difficult if we’ve grown up in a family where boundaries didn’t exist or where they were diffused by dysfunctional behavior. I know this firsthand.

Let me tell you about “Deb” who had a heart to help our ministry—and me. Smart, competent, artistic, Deb was invaluable as a creative “can-do” project manager. But despite wonderful qualities, Deb could be controlling. Given my propensity to be a peace-at-any-price person, I often allowed her to control me. (Notice my words: *I allowed her!*)

Sometimes Deb would speak harshly to me, even in front of others. Or, if she didn’t agree with what I had written, she would insist that her changes be made. Sometimes she made untrue accusations. No matter my explanation, she refused to accept the truth. I hate to admit this, but sometimes I even confessed I was wrong when I knew I wasn’t—just to get past the impasse. (Now, that’s really wrong!)

Deb became increasingly disrespectful. Several people revealed negative comments she’d made about me. Some asked, “June, why do you let her talk to you this way? Why don’t you stand up for yourself? You shouldn’t let her control you.” They were right.

How well I remember establishing my first boundary with Deb. I laid the groundwork with these words (her responses in parentheses):

“Do you want us to have the best relationship possible?” (*Yes.*)

“Do you believe we’re truly encouraging each other?” (*No.*)

“In friendship, both should be better because of each other, like iron sharpening iron. Do you agree?” (*Yes, I do.*)

“Do you think we are both better?” (*No.*)

“Deb, I value our friendship. But when you explode in anger, it hurts both of us.” (*I agree.*)

“So, in the future if either of us expresses anger inappropriately, we need to step back and part ways for a while so that we don’t damage our relationship further.”

Deb said she understood, but of course, the boundary had not been tested. That time came within a week.

While driving to Deb's home, I checked my voicemail. I heard her attacking, caustic voice, "Where are you? Where have you been? Why aren't you here?" She sounded out of control. However, when I arrived at her house, Deb was calm and asked, "Are you ready to go?"

"Well, actually no. Remember our previous agreement about what would happen if one of us exploded in anger? We agreed to part ways for a time."

"You can't leave!" She exploded in an angry tirade which continued for several minutes.

Holding up my hand (palm toward her), I firmly said, "Stop!" To my astonishment, she did—she stopped! Speaking slowly in a low voice I finally said, "Obviously now is not a good time for us to be together." Again, deliberately speaking slow and low, I said, "I'm going to leave."

Shocked, Deb said, "You can't leave."

I repeated our agreement: "If either of us expresses excessive anger, we agreed to temporarily not be together. So I need to leave. Later on, we can try again."

I drove away amid great protest. Deb kept calling my cell phone and home phone, and I did not answer. Candidly, I was amazed that I'd set a boundary and kept it!

Why this temporary separation? Proverbs 22:24 wisely advises, "*Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person. Do not associate with one easily angered.*"

Two days later, she tearfully apologized, and for two weeks, no explosions occurred. However, the next time Deb vented, I left again—and perhaps eight more times over a two-year period—with much less intensity over time. Eventually, the outbursts ceased.

As I look back, over time, Deb respected me less and less. I would say, "You don't treat anyone else this way—why me?" She always answered, "I don't know."

The truth is, *I allowed* myself to be her verbal punching bag. But finally when I enforced the boundary, the verbal venom decreased and her respect for me increased. I didn't expect that.

My experience taught me this: Because the concept of boundaries began with God, the healthiest relationships have boundaries. They protect both your heart and your home.

But realize, a relationship either *grows* or *goes*. It grows to be mutually beneficial and rewarding, or it goes downhill, goes astray—or maybe even goes away.

You can't make another person change. People have the choice to change, to be respectful—or not. Our responsibility is to enforce proper boundaries, which can challenge others to change.

God's Word exhorts us to "*Show proper respect to everyone*" (1 Peter 2:17). Respect is at the heart of healthy boundaries. You'll be amazed at how many people will change—when you do your part.

June Hunt
Founder, Hope For The Heart

BOUNDARIES

How to Set Them—How to Keep Them

Are you feeling stretched beyond your limits? Are you overcommitted, burning the candle at both ends? Are you trying to be everything to everyone? If so, *you* need boundaries!

Do people often take advantage of you? Do you say *Yes* to everyone and *No* to no one? Do you think you're supposed to meet everyone else's needs? If so, you need *boundaries*!

You need to know where your responsibility ends and someone else's begins. This means at times, you need to say *No* to people so you can say *Yes* to God.

Just as nations have protective boundaries, your relationships need protective boundaries to guard your personal time, emotional energy, and physical strength.

We cannot *be everything* or *do everything* for anyone—much less *everyone*. Therefore, we must choose how we relate to people in our lives.

Note how Jesus established a boundary in His relationship with two of His disciples. Brothers James and John said, “*Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.*” “*You don’t know what you are asking.*” Jesus said. . . . *When the ten [other disciples] heard about this, they became indignant with James and John*” (Mark 10:37–38, 41). Then Jesus refuted their request with this contrast:

*“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,
and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”*

(MARK 10:43–44)

DEFINITIONS



*“Personal boundaries
are like fences,
protecting you
from wrong people,
wrong places,
and wrong priorities.”*



Boundaries! They were vital when God brought forth something from nothing. One of the most vivid pictures of *physical boundaries* is recorded in the Bible when the Creator Himself poses a litany of rhetorical questions to the man named Job, who questions the goodness of God.

Consider a few of these rapid-fire questions from Job chapter 38:

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? . . . Who marked off its dimensions? . . . Who stretched a measuring line across it? . . . Who laid its cornerstone? . . . Who shut up the sea behind doors . . . when I fixed limits for it . . . when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt?’” (Job 38:4–6, 8, 10–11).

God directly confronts Job’s wrong thinking, thus his heart becomes deeply humbled.

*“I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?’
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know. . . .
My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.
Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”*
(JOB 42:2–3, 5–6)

What Are Boundaries?

Boundaries are such an indispensable aspect of life that they often exist unnoticed. *Physical boundaries* say: “My property is mine” or “My body is mine. Your body is yours.” They keep us in our own lane and out of someone else’s lane. *Personal boundaries* say: “I am me. You are you. This is *my* responsibility, and that is *your* responsibility.” *Spiritual boundaries* keep our eyes on God’s purpose for us and off His purpose for someone else. “God’s plan for me is this. God’s plan for you is something else.”

God ordained boundaries, but He is limitless.

*“Great is our Lord and mighty in power;
his understanding has no limit.”*

(PSALM 147:5)

A boundary is an established limit—a line that should not be crossed.

The first of God’s Ten Commandments states: “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3).

— A marked limit of an area

Example: *Sports*—Many sports have marked off boundaries that define the “field of play” (soccer, football, baseball, tennis, swimming, etc.). All competition is confined to the designated area alone. When a competitor crosses a boundary line, there is an immediate repercussion.

— A limit intended to create necessary space

Example: *Relationships*—Boundaries regarding behaviors are set between those in a relationship. For instance, marriage laws in some places forbid adultery by a spouse and declare it grounds for divorce. Other distancing behaviors include addiction, abuse, and codependency.

A boundary is a dividing line.

— A line that separates one entity from another

Example: *Territories*—lines that separate countries, states, counties, cities, personal property. The Niagara River divides Canada from the United States by forming a part of the northeast boundary of the U.S. and the southeast boundary of Canada.

— A line that should not be crossed

Example: *Curbs*—A curb is a protective edge of a sidewalk. Drivers are not allowed to drive on the sidewalk. If they cross over the curb from a street onto the sidewalk, they could experience numerous repercussions: hitting a pedestrian or stationary object, damaging their car, getting a ticket, etc.

Boundaries at the Beginning of Human History

Physical boundaries are territorial lines that divide one area from another.

- Anyone who owns a piece of property has the *right to control* the property and the *responsibility to set rules* for those on the property. In the Bible, the first boundary given to a person was spoken directly from God to Adam. “*The LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die’*” (Genesis 2:16–17).
- You have both the right of personal control and the responsibility of setting rules for others regarding what is yours. God, the Creator and *owner* of the Garden of Eden, had the right to set the rules for everything and everyone in the garden.
 “*For when you eat from it [the tree] you will certainly die*” (GENESIS 2:17).

Moral boundaries are ethical lines that divide right from wrong.

- When a boundary is *respected*, the result is a *reward*. God set up a moral boundary for Adam and Eve—based on right and wrong. When God’s boundary was honored, the couple enjoyed a *reward*—the abundance of the garden and unbroken fellowship with God.
- When a boundary is *rejected*, the result is a *repercussion*. When God’s boundary was violated, the couple experienced a *repercussion*—sin entered the world, which disqualified Adam and Eve from staying within the bounds of the garden.
- When you communicate a clear, rightful boundary—with a *reward* and a *repercussion*—and someone violates that boundary, the repercussion is inevitable and, if possible, instantaneous. In choosing to violate a boundary, *the violator*, not the boundary-setter, is *choosing the repercussion*.

The principle of rewards and repercussions was clearly demonstrated when God set a boundary with Adam and Eve. By choosing to violate that boundary, they *chose the repercussion* assigned to their sin.

*“To Adam he said,
‘Because you listened to your wife
and ate fruit from the tree
about which I commanded you,
“You must not eat from it,”
Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food
from it all the days of your life.”’*
(GENESIS 3:17)

Personal boundaries are lines that separate one person from another.

— *Personal boundaries* are the healthy by-product of realizing we are uniquely separate from one another and personally responsible for our own responses. Adam and Eve clearly knew God’s rule and the repercussion, yet the serpent (Satan) deceived Eve when he said,

“You will not certainly die . . . you will be like God” (GENESIS 3:4–5).

- ♦ Eve lacked *personal boundaries*—she allowed the serpent to have undue influence over her and she chose to believe the serpent’s lie.
- ♦ Adam lacked *personal boundaries*—he allowed Eve to have undue influence over him and he chose to ignore God’s warning.

You—not anyone else—are responsible for your own thoughts and beliefs, decisions and actions. However, after God confronted them about eating the forbidden fruit, Adam blamed Eve, then Eve blamed the serpent. Neither took personal responsibility for violating the boundary.

“The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’ Then the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate’”
(GENESIS 3:12–13).

— A *personal boundary* means you alone are responsible for your own choices. Boundaries are integral to your individual identity (who you uniquely are) . . . as well as your individual decisions and responsibilities.

Adam and Eve needed to think as *individuals* about what God said and what others said. Choosing not to stay within God’s boundary caused a repercussion that changed their lives—and ours—forever.

“The LORD God banished them from the Garden of Eden.”

(GENESIS 3:23 NLT)

What Is the Purpose of Personal Boundaries?

Personal boundaries are powerful protectors. The boundary of a tiger’s cage keeps a dangerous tiger inside the cage and keeps vulnerable people outside the cage. In relationships, boundaries are put in place to guard, to protect, and to provide a healthy environment for relationships.

Have you ever experienced the pain of someone hurting you?

You shouldn’t be surprised. The Bible says, *“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked”* (Jeremiah 17:9 NLT). Boundaries are necessary to protect you from those who might attempt to take advantage of you. The Bible reveals the treasure within you that is to be guarded above everything else.

*“Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.”*

(PROVERBS 4:23)

Personal boundaries allow you to:

- **Determine** what belongs to you and what belongs to another
- **Decide** who and what you will prioritize in your life
- **Designate** what you personally have power and authority over
- **Demonstrate** how you will maintain control over your body, soul, and spirit

- **Declare** limits in your relationships—and your right to enforce them
- **Delineate** how you will maintain your moral convictions, not violating your conscience

Have you been pressured to do something that brought chaos into your life?

Personal boundaries bring order to your life. The Bible says,

“Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”

(1 CORINTHIANS 14:40)

Personal boundaries convey:

- What you are *and* what you aren’t
- What you value *and* what you don’t
- What you believe *and* what you don’t
- What you’ll endure *and* what you won’t
- What you’ll accept *and* what you won’t
- What you’ll give *and* what you won’t

Have you been manipulated into giving money and later regretted giving it?

Pray for wisdom to establish the best boundaries possible. They will help you be the best person possible, have the healthiest relationships possible, and make the best decisions possible.

*“How much better to get wisdom than gold,
to get insight rather than silver!”*

(PROVERBS 16:16)

What Are the Benefits of Personal Boundaries?

Imagine a fence around your home. That fence protects young children from strolling into the street—perhaps from being injured, kidnapped, or even killed. Likewise, fences also provide privacy and barriers against open access to your property by strangers or stray animals.

Personal boundaries are like fences, protecting you from wrong people, wrong places, and wrong priorities. Personal boundaries also guard you from giving more time, talent, and tolerance than you should, protecting you from people taking more than they should. Boundaries also make it possible for you to enjoy mutual give-and-take within healthy relationships.

Have you been repeatedly taken advantage of by a “taker”?

In life, there are *givers* and *takers*. Instead of believing everything you’re told, biblical wisdom warns you to be prudent and to not be taken in.

*“The simple believe anything,
but the prudent give thought to their steps.”*

(PROVERBS 14:15)

Relational boundaries enable you to:

- **Stand** up for yourself, speak your mind, and share your relationship restrictions appropriately
- **Feel** comfortable in giving honest feedback without fear
- **Be firm** with others, thoughtfully and unapologetically
- **Respect** the rules of others and act in their best interest
- **Establish** and maintain healthy give-and-take relationships
- **Defend** others and promote equality in relationships

Have you had a "one-sided" relationship where you didn't feel valued?

Jesus establishes your foundation for healthy relationships: Live by "The Golden Rule."

"Do to others as you would have them do to you."

(LUKE 6:31)

Emotional and mental boundaries equip you to:

- **Evaluate** the appropriateness of your thoughts and emotions in light of God's Word
- **Guard** against letting your own emotions—or someone else's—control you
- **Investigate** truth for yourself to ensure choices are in agreement with God
- **Feel** the freedom to agree or disagree with others without fear or guilt
- **Communicate** your own thoughts and emotions in a Christlike way
- **Disengage** from those who try to manipulate, hurt, or lie to you

Have you been mentally shot down, causing you to feel emotionally shut down?

The Bible communicates how to deal with lies and deception and live in light of truth.

"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

(2 CORINTHIANS 10:5)

Spiritual boundaries allow you to:

- **Enjoy** a right relationship with God by entrusting your life to Christ
- **Distinguish** between what God desires for you and what others may desire for you
- **Commit** to being controlled by Christ, not controlled by others

- **Associate** with encouraging Christians and avoid people who are divisive
- **Refuse** to be manipulated by spiritual leaders and those who twist Scripture
- **Live** in a way that pleases God, not as a people pleaser

Have you felt pressured to please people— instead of pleasing God?

The Bible presents these challenging questions . . .

*“Am I now trying to win the approval
of human beings, or of God?
Or am I trying to please people?
If I were still trying to please people,
I would not be a servant of Christ.”*
(GALATIANS 1:10)

Moral and ethical boundaries teach you to:

- **Know** the difference between right and wrong
- **Discern** the true character of a person
- **Act** on the courage of your convictions
- **Say** No to people so you can say Yes to God
- **Live** a life of integrity, being the same in the dark as you are in the light
- **Evaluate** the way you think, feel, and act toward others

Have you been expected to violate your conscience or lie based on loyalty?

The Lord requires you to do only what is right.

*“The Lord has told you what is good,
and this is what he requires of you:
to do what is right, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.”*
(MICAH 6:8 NLT)

Sexual boundaries empower you to:

- **Define** your understanding of appropriate sexual expression
- **Discern** what of a sexual nature you will not allow yourself to watch, hear, or experience
- **Determine** whether or not you will allow yourself to be sexually touched, verbally seduced, or emotionally enticed
- **Decide** the parameters you will place on your thought life regarding sex
- **Delay** sexual activity until in a godly marriage relationship
- **Detail** how you will respond in the heat of passionate temptation

**Have you struggled with sexual boundaries—
not knowing how to hold the line?**

God’s Word clearly states sexual boundaries are not to be violated.

*“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified;
that you should avoid sexual immorality;
that each of you should learn to control your own body
in a way that is holy and honorable.”*

(1 THESSALONIANS 4:3–4)

Physical boundaries help you to:

- **Guard** yourself against abusive people
- **Maintain** a sense of being separate and uniquely you
- **Prevent** physical injury to yourself and to others
- **Protect** your personal individuality when with others
- **Avoid** the appearance of impropriety
- **Explore** your own individual interests, strengths, aptitudes, and desires

Have you been manipulated with words like, “You must do this with me. . . . You owe me.”?

God’s Word says your body belongs to Him.

*“Do you not know that your bodies
are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you,
whom you have received from God?
You are not your own; you were bought at a price.
Therefore honor God with your bodies.”
(1 CORINTHIANS 6:19–20)*

Healthy Boundaries

Question: “As a Christian, I’m taught to be unselfish, patient, and generous—to love others as much as I love myself. Given those parameters, how do I maintain healthy boundaries without being either a doormat or a sledgehammer?”

Answer: Having healthy boundaries is a balance between caring for others and caring for yourself. Appropriate boundaries are not selfish or unloving. As a Christian, you can continue to be generous with your time and attention without having to be available to anyone and everyone all of the time.

God created us to be in relationship with one another. He made us to be unique individuals who benefit from being together with others in relationships. The way we succeed at being dependent on God as independent individuals and interdependent participants in relationships simultaneously is accomplished through healthy boundaries. Each aspect of life requires a balance of give-and-take. Boundaries help protect us. If we devote too much of ourselves exclusively to one relationship, we have nothing left for other important relationships.

In truth, healthy people have healthy relationships because they understand what healthy boundaries provide:

- Security and confidence in who we are as individual creations of God
- The ability to say *Yes* and *No* to others without guilt or fear
- “Fences” that keep us from harming each other, but allow us to love each other within a safe space.

With boundaries, we are able to juggle togetherness and separateness by creating and maintaining that delicate balance in our relationships. We do this by keeping our relationship with God in the proper place of *priority*, others in a proper place of *importance*, and ourselves in a proper place of *perspective*. When God comes first and people come second, we have godly *companionship* with one another.

“Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it:

“Love your neighbor as yourself.””

(MATTHEW 22:37–39)

What Is God’s Heart on Boundaries?

God created us to be His image bearers—literally to bear the image of God. In the first chapter of Genesis, God says, “*Let us make human beings in our image*” (Genesis 1:26 NLT). We are to be like Him in our character and are to act like Him.

God’s heart is that we set boundaries that are mutually beneficial for our relationships with one another, and He clearly communicates those boundaries in His Word. He gives us written boundaries to show us who He is and what He requires of us.

*“Live in harmony with one another.
Do not be proud . . . Do not be conceited.”*
(ROMANS 12:16)

God’s Blueprint for Boundaries in Relationships

God established parameters for godly relationships, as revealed in His Word. He has ordained boundaries for us—boundaries we need to set and maintain. By grasping God’s heart on boundaries, we can develop meaningful relationships that are pleasing to God and fulfilling to us. When this occurs, we . . .

Treat one another with respect.

“Show proper respect to everyone” (1 PETER 2:17).

Listen to one another and consider our words before we speak.

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak” (JAMES 1:19).

Do not lie, but speak truthfully from the heart.

“Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor”
(EPHESIANS 4:25).

Say Yes or No without lengthy justification or feeling guilty.

“All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’” (MATTHEW 5:37).

Give and accept correction while refraining from flattery.

“Whoever rebukes a person will in the end gain favor rather than one who has a flattering tongue” (PROVERBS 28:23).

Confront one another with love, grace, and truth when we sin against one other.

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over” (MATTHEW 18:15).

Express anger in a helpful, not hurtful manner.

“In your anger do not sin” (EPHESIANS 4:26).

Take responsibility for doing wrong and forgive others when we’ve been wronged.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (EPHESIANS 4:32).

Encourage one another—verbally, emotionally, and spiritually.

“Let us not neglect our meeting together . . . but encourage one another” (HEBREWS 10:25 NLT).

Practice mutual submission.

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (EPHESIANS 5:21).

Remove ourselves from abusive situations.

“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered” (PROVERBS 22:24).

Refuse to stay in a relationship if either of us is negatively influencing the other.

“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character’” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:33).

Following God’s blueprint for boundaries, we can establish healthy relationships and build godly character.



CHARACTERISTICS



*“Beneficial boundaries
are loving and are aimed
at honoring, respecting,
and protecting ourselves
and others.”*



A true tug-of-war struggle between dad and daughter is starting . After the death of his wife, 81-year-old Larry continues living at home, but needs assistance with shopping for groceries, supplies, and doing small chores. His daughter, a nurse, drives an hour on Saturdays to help. However, a problem soon arises over Larry’s coarse language. Like fingernails on a chalkboard, his language becomes so grating that Loretta realizes she must set a boundary.

“Dad, I love you and always want to help you, but your language hurts my heart. You can choose to speak this way, but if you do, that will let me know you don’t want my presence or my help and I will leave. But understand, *you* will be choosing to be without my help.”

The next week when Loretta arrives to tackle Dad’s to-do list, the profanity starts within 15 minutes. “Dad, I came to help you, but since you’ve chosen to continue using offensive language, I told you I would leave. Obviously, you don’t want my help now.”

“What? You can’t leave! You promised to help!” Larry yells.

“I want to help, but this is your choice. I’ll be back next week and we’ll try again.”

Loretta leaves hurt, and her dad is hurt too—but he is the one who *chose* to cross the line—the boundary line of inappropriate language. So she follows through with the repercussion. She also returns the following week. Her father greets her and remains a perfect gentleman during that Saturday and the next, and the next. However, on her fourth visit, he tests her resolve by using coarse language again.

“Oh, Dad. I’m so sorry you don’t want my help this week. I love you, and I’ll see you next week.” And off she goes. It takes only a few more times of testing, and within a few months her father treats her with new value and a new vocabulary. These boundaries are not about winning a game. For this dad/daughter duo, it’s about winning a relationship—a new relationship of respect.

*“The words of the reckless pierce like swords,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”*

(PROVERBS 12:18)

What Distinguishes Bad Boundaries from Beneficial Boundaries?

Beneficial boundaries are loving and are aimed at honoring, respecting, and protecting ourselves and others. Those looking for a litmus test for evaluating beneficial boundaries need to look closely at 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 where love is described.

*“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy,
it does not boast, it is not proud.
It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking,
it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
It always protects, always trusts, always hopes,
always perseveres. Love never fails.”*

As you distinguish bad boundaries from beneficial boundaries, be aware of the following differences in progression between these two types of boundary setters:

*“The LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth
come knowledge and understanding. . . .
For he guards the course of the just
and protects the way of his faithful ones. . . .
Discretion will protect you,
and understanding will guard you.”*
(PROVERBS 2:6, 8, 11)

In seeking to distinguish beneficial boundaries from bad boundaries, be aware of the differences.

Bad Boundaries vs. Beneficial Boundaries

Situation: Someone intentionally misrepresents the truth about your words. It's called *slander*. You're upset. You know the rumor mill will further distort the truth unless you take action to stop it. What you do next will determine whether you practice bad or beneficial boundaries.

If you have bad boundaries: You define yourself based on what others say or feel about you, and you'll do almost anything to feel their acceptance.

If you have beneficial boundaries: You define yourself based on what God says about you. You know He accepts you; therefore, you aren't controlled by others.

*"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you,
in order to bring praise to God."*

(ROMANS 15:7)

If you have bad boundaries: You're afraid to confront because you fear people won't agree with you. This leaves you feeling inferior.

If you have beneficial boundaries: You're not afraid to confront respectfully because you trust the Lord is leading you to do what is right.

*"Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe."*

(PROVERBS 29:25)

If you have bad boundaries: You isolate yourself in order to minimize exposure to the offender, and you see yourself as a victim. You don't ask for what needs to change.

If you have beneficial boundaries: Even at the risk of being hurt, you form a relationship based on respectful communication in order to ask for change from the offender.

"You do not have because you do not ask God."

(JAMES 4:2)

If you have bad boundaries: You have difficulty trusting people, so you rarely communicate anything of depth. You don't rely on anyone for counsel.

If you have beneficial boundaries: Although not everyone is trustworthy, you do have a few trustworthy friends. You can rely on their counsel.

*“One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin,
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”*

(PROVERBS 18:24)

If you have bad boundaries: You are enmeshed in relationships but lack true intimacy. You retreat within yourself, concealing your inmost feelings. You feel unsafe confronting, so you keep your guard up, believing no one genuinely cares for you.

If you have beneficial boundaries: You have many acquaintances but choose to be totally open and transparent with only the few who have proven themselves safe—those who always have your best interests at heart.

*“A friend loves at all times, and a brother
is born for a time of adversity.”*

(PROVERBS 17:17)

If you have bad boundaries: When finally confronting the offender, you stumble, becoming inconsistent and rigid. When challenged, you overreact and over explain.

If you have beneficial boundaries: When confronting the offender, you are consistent and calm, respectful and firm, straightforward and assertive. When challenged, you stay centered and succinct.

*“The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit.”*

(PROVERBS 18:21)

If you have bad boundaries: You use boundaries as a weapon against others to exert power over them. You deceive them through lies and half-truths to keep them off balance and at a distance.

If you have beneficial boundaries: You use boundaries as an accurate safeguard, demonstrating your desire to maintain a healthy, honest, God-honoring relationship.

*“Do not lie to each other,
since you have taken off your old self
with its practices.”*
(COLOSSIANS 3:9)

If you have bad boundaries: You cannot understand how the offender could wrong you, thus you come to a false conclusion. Being self-deceived, you simply say, “I can’t do anything about it.”

If you have beneficial boundaries: You identify how the offender has chosen wrong and confront, stating the boundary. Then you state the repercussion if the offense is repeated.

*“The wisdom of the prudent is
to give thought to their ways,
but the folly of fools is deception.”*
(PROVERBS 14:8)

If you have bad boundaries: You don’t enforce the repercussion for negative behavior. Therefore, the offender—who has demonstrated untrustworthy character—continues to cause more painful consequences. You are misled, thinking this slanderer won’t do it again.

If you have beneficial boundaries: You enforce repercussions with the slanderer for the unacceptable behavior. If no change occurs, you discontinue the relationship. You reward positive change of behavior with encouraging compliments to help the relationship flourish.

*“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company
corrupts good character.’”*
(1 CORINTHIANS 15:33)

What Indicates Broken Boundaries?

When it comes to modeling healthy relationships through establishing and maintaining beneficial boundaries, Jesus is the one we are to imitate.

“Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.”

(1 JOHN 2:6)

Checklist for 20 Broken Boundaries

As you seek to identify broken boundaries in your life, place a check mark (✓) in the box beside the following statements that are generally true of you:

- I have difficulty making decisions and sticking with them if someone opposes them.
- I feel like I must seek the opinions of others before acting on a decision.
- I fear expressing what I really feel.
- I lack confidence in my own convictions.
- I avoid certain people because I fear I might be embarrassed.
- I have difficulty maintaining eye contact with others.
- I am reluctant to ask others for help.
- I dread losing the love and affection of others.
- I do favors for others even when I know I shouldn't.
- I avoid asking people to return overdue items they've borrowed.
- I need a great deal of assurance from others.
- I ignore untruthfulness in others by failing to correct them.
- I have difficulty opposing unfair situations.
- I think I have to answer the phone every time it rings.
- I typically listen to a telemarketer even when I want to say, “No, thank you.”

- I feel compelled to send money when I receive solicitations or requests for donations.
- I feel guilty when I say *No* to someone who is asking for my time.
- I sometimes accept the blame for the mistakes of others.
- I feel guilty when someone suffers a repercussion for breaking a boundary I set.

The Bible says, “*Say ‘No’ to ungodliness . . . live self-controlled*” (Titus 2:12).

If you struggle with broken boundaries, you may have excessive fear of disappointing others, receiving criticism, or losing love. The Lord doesn’t want you to live in a state of fear but rather in the confident assurance of His constant presence.

Try reading the following verses of Scripture aloud over the next few days. Hearing His word will help to reinforce the truth that God is your strength, your confidence, and your security.

*“The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?
. . . Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.”*

(PSALM 27:1, 3)

Triangulation

QUESTION: “What is ‘triangulation,’ and how does it relate to boundaries?”

ANSWER: Triangulation occurs when a non-involved third party is sought out separately and pulled into a conflict rather than the parties involved in the conflict seeking to resolve the issue directly with each other.¹ (Mediation—a third party directly interacting with two or more parties simultaneously—differs from triangulation.)

For instance, triangulation occurs when . . .

One marriage partner relies on another person (a child, a friend, or family member) to communicate with the spouse with whom they are having trouble communicating.

Two friends in conflict vent to another friend separately to gain support for their side.

In triangulation, rather than the offended party taking the responsibility to seek a solution to a personal problem in a direct and healthy way, the individual seeks support and advocacy from a sympathetic ally.

Triangulation is rooted in being afraid to confront, yet this not what Christ teaches.

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.”

(MATTHEW 18:15)

What Are Signs of Crossed Boundaries?

People who grow up with few boundaries or no boundaries become accustomed to having their own rights violated. Mistreatment becomes mainstream. In their frustration or attempt at self-preservation, many perpetuate the pattern by mistreating others, often without understanding what they are doing or why.

They simply live out what they have learned through their own personal experience—“You do unto others what was done to you!” Or, they model the more passive responses of other abuse victims. Letting go of the victim mentality is not easy; however, the Bible says . . .

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

(GALATIANS 5:1)

Signs of Crossed Boundaries

Those who are boundaryless tend to develop some of the same characteristics:²

Nonconfrontational—Skills necessary for confronting problem people are virtually nonexistent or ineffective. Rather than dealing directly with those needing boundaries, they either become emotionally, verbally, or physically abusive or they simply fail to set appropriate limits (their lack of confrontation is blamed on others).

Irresponsible—Denial, justification, blame games, guilt trips, and other forms of manipulation replace the practice of assuming responsibility for their own inappropriate boundaries.

Closed—Lack of openness, honesty, and transparency are typical. Skills for developing intimacy are considered foolish and unnecessary or even threatening and terrifying.

Secretive—Following severe abuse, concealment is common and even considered necessary for self-defense and self-preservation. Hiding the truth is especially prevalent in cases where sexual boundaries have been violated.

Inconsistent—Strategies for implementing repercussions and rewards are virtually nonexistent. Inconsistency reigns in every area, resulting in continued confusion and distrust.

Envious—With a sense of inadequacy and insecurity, continual striving for attention, acceptance, affirmation, and approval feels necessary. When another person excels, envy can be the natural by-product.

Defensive—Self-protective behaviors can reflect a need to deny feelings of being unloved, insignificant, and insecure. Defensive about unhealthy relationships, adult daughters often want to remain “daddy’s little princess” and grown sons want to be “mommy’s little prince” rather than becoming emotionally invested in healthy relationships.

Recognizing that personal boundaries have been repeatedly violated and then working through the pain of that awareness to make necessary changes takes courage, tenacity, and hope.

God not only meets our needs but gives us far more than we could ever ask or imagine. Our security is rooted in God's love.

"I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

(EPHESIANS 3:17–19)

What Connects Codependency to Boundaries?

Codependency and a lack of boundaries go hand-in-hand. When you are in a codependent relationship, you depend on another person to the point of being addicted to that person. You also open yourself up to being controlled and manipulated by them. Codependency is the natural by-product of having few or no boundaries because it is driven by the lack of personal wholeness and sufficiency.

When you become dependant on another person—to the point of being addicted to that person—you're in a codependent relationship. As such, you open yourself up to their manipulation and control.

The problem for those who are codependent is not their dependency but rather the *object* of their dependency. The fact is, we are all dependent, but our desire and focus should be on the Lord and not on another person. As the psalmist wrote regarding His relationship with God . . .

*"I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.
Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is
the strength of my heart and my portion forever."
(PSALM 73:23–26)*

Codependency is . . .

- **Evidenced by** a dependent person focusing an inordinate amount of their time, energy, and attention meeting the needs and desires of others to the point of neglecting their own personal needs and desires.
- **Based on** the erroneous belief that this subservient helper/rescuer obtains or gains value when immersed in meeting the needs of others.
- **Rooted in** the premise that one person not only validates the worth of another person, but also has power over that person's thoughts, feelings, and circumstances.
- **Identified as** a relationship dominated by fear and control where a person's power is exaggerated, misdirected, or generally abused.
- **Reinforced by** boundary violators who take advantage of or manipulate a dependent person to get their own way without regard for anyone else's feelings, needs, or desires.
- **Characterized by** unsolicited advice, deception, and intimidation as well as excessive control, anger, and intrusion.

Almost without fail, those who allow themselves to be held captive in codependent relationships find . . .

*"They loved human praise more than praise from God."
(JOHN 12:43)*

What Repercussions Result from Resisting Boundaries?

Boundaries typically come with *rewards* and *repercussions*. Stay *within* the boundaries and there are *rewards*. Step *outside* the boundaries and there are *repercussions*. At times, we need to set specific boundaries and determine appropriate rewards and repercussions.

For example, if a friend routinely asks for a ride, but never offers to chip in for gas, you should set a boundary: “Pat, I don’t mind giving you a ride from time to time, but this is becoming a regular occurrence. It would help me if we could share the cost of the gas. That way there is mutual give-and-take. I always want us to show respect toward each other and us splitting the cost of gas would make me feel respected. Is this something you will agree to do when you need a ride from me?” (Wait for a response.) If no agreement is offered, “Then I think it would be best if you could make other arrangements.”

The laws God established for the nation of Israel certainly reflect this premise.

*“Show proper respect to everyone,
love the family of believers,
fear God, honor the emperor.”*
(1 PETER 2:17)

Broken Boundaries with Appropriate Repercussions

Examples of broken boundaries with appropriate repercussions include:

Money misused by a teenager—Money will be reimbursed and further funds withheld until the responsible use of money is reestablished.

Wife abused—In addition to any legal repercussions, the abusive husband is not allowed to spend time alone with his wife until the boundary of self-control is learned, reinforced through counseling, and maintained for at least six to 12 months.

Lies told—Trust is withheld and verification of future information is required until the offender proves that truthfulness has become a consistent priority.

Adultery committed—Contact with the third party stops, marriage and individual counseling starts, sexual relations between the marriage partners is suspended until receiving results of STD tests with suggested medical treatment completed, and then until trust is rebuilt and faithfulness is reestablished.

Abusive language—Interaction stops and both parties part until civility in conversations is respected and honored.

Inappropriate anger—Causes for loss of control are explored and resolved through counseling; anger management must be learned and demonstrated over time.

No ignored by a young child—The topic in question is temporarily off limits for discussion and time-outs are enforced if resistance to being told *no* persists.

Time disrespected by a friend—After waiting a reasonable, previously agreed on amount of time (e.g., 20 minutes), meeting together will be rescheduled.

When establishing repercussions, they must be clearly stated. The goal of repercussions is not punishment, but to promote respect, courtesy, and appreciation by honoring appropriate boundaries.

Resistance to a particular boundary indicates there is a problem that needs to be addressed, a hurt that needs to be healed, or a pattern of behavior that needs to be changed for the good of the relationship and for mutual growth.

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

(PROVERBS 27:17)

Shifting the Blame

Question: “My husband walked away from our family and has been unfaithful. Now he wants to come back. In spite of our hurt, the children and I still love him. When I asked him to be tested for sexually transmitted diseases, he accused me of not being a forgiving and compassionate Christian. He says I’m being punitive, but I think I’m being practical. Who is right?”

Answer: Your husband appears to be shifting blame in an attempt to avoid the repercussions for his actions. He is trying to turn the tables on you rather than acknowledge the plain and simple truth that he is the one who has done wrong and he must pay the price that comes with his choices.

Shifting the blame from himself rather than taking responsibility for placing you in this precarious position is unacceptable. He needs to humbly accept this reasonable repercussion for his actions and must be tested for sexually transmitted diseases.

This repercussion is not to shame or humiliate him, but rather to protect you. It appears that he is thinking of *himself* and not *you*; otherwise, he would take the initiative to do everything possible to keep you safe. Love protects; it doesn’t risk harm to others.

Maintain your commitment to do what is best for yourself and refuse to be manipulated. If it is your desire to attempt to reconcile, insist on his compliance of your boundary as a condition to begin restoring your marriage.

*“If you return to the Almighty,
you will be restored—
so clean up your life.”*
(JOB 22:23 NLT)

Forgiveness vs. Enablement

Question: “What does forgiveness and enablement have to do with boundaries?”

Answer: Forgiveness is *not* enablement. Forgiveness means to “release.” If a man borrows money from you and later refuses to repay you, then you should forgive him (Luke 11:4; Colossians 3:13). Release both him and the offense to God, for your sake if for no other, so that you do not become bitter. But you should not enter into another monetary transaction with him. That is where it becomes *enablement* and a *boundary* issue.

Enabling means you allow others to continue in their bad behavior by either not establishing a boundary in the first place, or by failing to enforce the repercussions when the boundary you established is disregarded.

Enablement places you in a position of being offended again and again.

Enabling never helps offenders change, but rather further ingrains their bad habits.

Enablers are people pleasers who fail to say *No* when they should.

Forgiveness places you in a position of not becoming bitter or holding on to offenses from the past.

Forgivers face the wrongs done toward them but never make excuses for the offenses.

Forgiveness is a gift of grace, enablement is a foolish invitation to further hurt and harm.

*“If you do not forgive others their sins,
your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

(MATTHEW 6:15)

CAUSES



“At the root of bad boundaries is a mistaken attempt to meet legitimate needs in an illegitimate way.”



Roger and Susan consider themselves to be good parents. They took their two boys to church and actively supported their efforts in school, sports and scouting. They cheered their accomplishments and facilitated their education—all to help them succeed in life.

Yet, the parents' comfortable nest must seem difficult to leave because their "baby birds" who are now in their thirties, show no signs of trying out their wings.

Both parents say they want their boys to be on their own, and their sons say they'd like to move out but just can't afford it. Of course, they'd have to leave the comfy, all-bills-paid home, along with television, Internet, insurance, and other amenities.

Candidly, living on their own doesn't appeal to them. And why should it? They have all the comforts of home with little responsibility. When parents provide virtually everything for their capable adult children, they hinder their growth and maturity. If only Roger and Susan had implemented positive boundaries designed to encourage their boys to become motivated men who are independent and strong—not unmotivated sons dependent on their parents.

God gives parents a fascinating picture from nature of urging offspring out of the nest. Look at the life of the majestic eagle. Once hatched, the baby birds are completely dependent on their parents to feed them, keep them warm, and protect them. But when the time comes for their young to leave the nest, the large eagle demonstrates how to flap its wings and then stirs the nest, removing feathers, leaves, and straw—all the soft linings.

Making the nest intentionally uncomfortable is one way to urge eaglets out of the nest and launch them into the sky. Yet, when eaglets first take flight, the parents watch in case the fledglings flounder. The protective parents stay ready to swoop in and carry the young bird back to the nest for another flying lesson until the young birds are soaring the skies on their own.

The biblical book of wisdom gives this instructive warning. . . .

*“Discipline your children while you still have the chance;
indulging them destroys them.”*

(PROVERBS 19:18 MSG)

What Experiences Help Us Learn Boundaries?

Responsibilities assigned to us in life increase over time as we pass through various developmental stages. As toddlers, we learn to brush our teeth, bathe our bodies, be tucked in bed. Yet, the fixed time we are to “be in bed” changes as we grow older. That’s when “bedtime battles” over boundaries occur—especially through the teenage years.

Our lives are initially protected by parents and guardians. They are the primary shapers of our childhood boundaries, which become modified throughout our lives. These boundaries can be strong, effective, and helpful, or they can be weak, ineffective, and harmful.

Regardless of boundaries learned—or not learned—from the past, we have a perfect parent in God, our heavenly Father. He will teach us not to repeat past bad patterns and train us to experience new, positive patterns.

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.

See, I am doing a new thing!”

(ISAIAH 43:18–19)

We learn boundaries as we observe and experience the natural laws of God’s created world.

We learn boundaries from parents and other authorities who model boundaries as they teach, encourage, and correct in love.³

We learn boundaries in our relationships with family, friends, and others.

We learn boundaries as we understand that we are to reflect God's character.

We learn boundaries from making mistakes and from the consequences of our own poor choices.

We learn boundaries from the wisdom we gain from our own interactions, then by applying what really works.

The apostle Paul said . . .

*“Join together in following my example,
brothers and sisters,
and just as you have us as a model,
keep your eyes on those who live as we do.”*

(PHILIPPIANS 3:17)

Too Much Help

Question: “How much help is too much?”

Answer: Consider the following boundary issues:

By allowing a needy person to be dependent on you, do you feel more significant?

Is your help meeting a real need that would otherwise go unmet, or is it creating a dependency on you to do what others could do for themselves?

Under the guise of being a giving person, are you helping others to attract attention or to feel good about yourself?

After helping someone, do you ever think, *How could you do this to me after all I've done for you?* Examine motives. Pray that you can discern the driving force behind both your need to help and the other person's need to be helped.

*“A person may think their own ways are right,
but the LORD weighs the heart.”*

(PROVERBS 21:2)

What Is the Process of Learning Boundaries As a Child?

By God's design, children are to be instructed by and learn boundaries from loving parents who have personally established healthy boundaries. Sadly, not all parents are committed to God's plan—for some parents, this lack of commitment stems from not having experienced healthy boundaries themselves, either as children or adults.

But if parents don't establish beneficial personal boundaries, how can they teach their children the importance of beneficial boundaries? The development of children follows a predictable course based on the type of parenting they receive. This is why the Bible emphasizes the importance of wise parenting.

*"Listen, my son, to your father's instruction
and do not forsake your mother's teaching."*

(PROVERBS 1:8)

As a parent responds to an infant's cries, the baby begins to . . .⁴

- Learn that someone is available to meet needs
- Enjoy a sense of having value and worth
- Bond with available caretakers
- Find security in bonding relationships

As the sense of security increases, the child begins to . . .⁵

- Experiment minimally with the environment
- Separate minimally from parents for small increments of time
- Establish limited personal autonomy
- Experience the exhilaration of exploration

As feelings of confidence and security grow, the child begins to . . .⁶

- Take more initiative to explore
- Move back and forth between the security of parental relationships and the challenge of separation

- Experience greater excitement and increased confidence
- Lay the foundation for formulating legitimate boundaries

We all have inner needs for love, significance, and security.⁷ When these needs are not appropriately and adequately met in childhood, self-confidence and healthy independence are not developed and a foundation for the development of codependent relationships is laid.

When we experience rejection rather than unconditional love, our “love bucket” (our internal capacity for love, significance, security, and acceptance) begins to leak and cannot be filled until those “holes”—or wounds—are healed.

Only the love of our perfect heavenly Father, God Himself, can reach deep enough and be pure enough to bring about complete healing.

*“He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.”*

(PSALM 147:3)

Boundaries for Kids

Question: “How can I explain to my child the need for boundaries?”

Answer: Jesus often used stories called parables to explain biblical principles in understandable ways. Likewise, you can use the following story to help explain boundaries to kids:

“Imagine a clever young goldfish gurgling, ‘I want to be free of this fishbowl! I don’t like the boundary of this bowl! It’s keeping me from going where I want to go and doing what I want to do—I want to be free!’

“So, one day the goldfish jumps a little here and leaps a little there. Finally, with a flip of his fins and a flap of his tail, he leaps outside the bowl.

“Now the fish is free! He’s cleared the boundary of the fishbowl!

“But now what happens to our little goldfish? Within minutes . . . he dies. This one act doomed him to certain death. Why?

- Goldfish need water.
- The fishbowl held the needed water.
- The boundary of the fishbowl held the water the goldfish needed for life.

“Being free to do whatever you want may seem right, but that doesn’t make it right. As Proverbs 14:12 says, *‘There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.’* God gave you to me and me to you. Part of my job is helping you stay safe in the ‘bowl’ God has given you. As you grow, God has designed your ‘bowl of boundaries’ to grow right along with you, so it will always be just the right size for you!”

What Are Five Biblical Truths about Boundaries?

Rhonda yearns to restore safety and sanity following the divorce from her physically abusive husband. Her 22-year-old son, Jared, lives at home while finishing college. Previously abused by his father, he is now verbally abusive toward his mother—and shirks his responsibilities.

When Rhonda insists that he be respectful and responsible, he heaps on even more verbal abuse. With the help of church elders, Rhonda sets the boundary that he must be respectful or move out of her home. Instead of showing her respect, he becomes incensed—even to the point of filing a lawsuit against his own mother!

The court rules in her favor, and Jared is forced to move out—in two weeks. After she helps gather boxes and packs his car, he attacks her faith: “I can’t believe you call yourself a Christian. . . . You’ll never see me graduate from law school. God would never evict His own son!”

Hesitantly, Rhonda reminds him, “Well, God did ‘evict’ Adam from the Garden.”

“So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden.”

(GENESIS 3:23)

Yes, he floorboarded the car’s gas pedal. And yes, after three years, he did call her to attend his graduation. And yes, a respectful relationship has been restored—the proof of beneficial boundaries.

When God gave the first couple, Adam and Eve, a boundary about what they could and could not eat, they were initially compliant because they knew the boundary giver to be loving, generous, and completely trustworthy. It wasn’t until Satan instilled doubt about God’s character that each chose to disobey God.

Had they not considered the possibility of God’s withholding good from them, they would have remained respectfully and happily obedient to Him.

Sin thrives in the world today and clouds the perspective of many regarding boundaries. Like everything good God has put into place in His creation, boundaries have been maligned and misrepresented as being unloving and undesirable. But this is not true. Boundaries in relationships are just as necessary and beneficial as boundaries in the physical world.

*“God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.
God saw that the light was good,
and he separated the light from the darkness.”*

(GENESIS 1:3–4)

Five Biblical Truths about Boundaries

The Bible reveals fundamental truths about boundaries:

1. Loving others requires boundaries.

You cannot truly love a person without limits.

- Love is doing what is best for someone, which requires setting boundaries to identify and separate what is best and what is less than best.
- Love is not being boundaryless nor is it two people morphing into one. Rather, it is the coming together of two different and distinct personalities in mutual affection, emotion, admiration, and unity.

The love you have for others is to mirror the love that Jesus has for you.

“We love because he first loved us” (1 JOHN 4:19).

2. Obeying God demands boundaries.

Jesus modeled boundaries in His obedience to God as an example to us all.

- He said *No* to everyone and everything His Father said *No* to, and He said *Yes* to everyone and everything His Father said *Yes* to.
- He did not do what everyone asked of Him, nor was He always available to everyone.

When you take the position Jesus took and maintain that perspective, you will be free and empowered. Guilt and fear prevent intimacy, while boundaries promote confidence and love.

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 JOHN 4:18).

3. Serving others necessitates boundaries.

Not everyone will encourage you in developing Christlike character. Choose wisely with whom you will share yourself and your resources.

- Set limits on your use of time, love, energy, and finances, looking to God to help determine your priorities.
- Identify the true need of others, discerning whether God intends for you to help meet that need or for them to meet that need themselves.

Saying *No* may initially produce resentment, but with mutual respect and trust, in time, the necessity of your boundary will be understood. We are to each carry our own (manageable) loads, but to share our overwhelmingly heavy burdens.

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. . . . For each one should carry their own load” (GALATIANS 6:2, 5).

4. Submission depends on boundaries.

Boundaries and submission are equally necessary to be effective. Jesus submitted to the will of His Father. Follow Christ’s example and submit to the boundaries He has laid out for your life and the purpose for which you were created.

- Biblical submission in relationships must be mutual—voluntary compliance is a good and balanced practice which benefits the relationship.
- Biblical submission glorifies God, not a person. The result is humility rather than power or pride.

Scripture encourages you to submit to the people the Lord has placed in your life to minister to you.

“You know that the household of Stephanas . . . devoted themselves to the service of the Lord’s people. I urge you . . . submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it” (1 CORINTHIANS 16:15–16).

5. Selfishness cannot survive boundaries.

Godly boundaries are based on love and are not self-seeking. Boundaries are intended to protect God’s children and ensure that His purposes are accomplished.

- Godly boundaries are an expression of selflessness, often requiring personal sacrifice and effort to both establish and maintain.

- Godly boundaries are often risky, evoking negative reactions from those who resent having limits or who do not want to take responsibility for their inappropriate behavior.

God’s Word speaks to the wisdom of putting away pride and selfishness.

“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (EPHESIANS 5:1–2).

What Is the Root Cause of Bad Boundaries?

At the root of bad boundaries—or even a total lack of boundaries—is a mistaken attempt to meet legitimate needs in an illegitimate way.

God is love, and He made us for loving relationships. His love is the basis for our boundaries and is the glue that holds our relationships together.

You exhibit God’s love in action when you love others, bond with them, express your own *boundaries*, and help them to achieve *healthy* boundaries as well.

The Bible speaks often about love because *“God is love.”*

*“Dear friends, let us love one another,
for love comes from God.
Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.
Whoever does not love does not know God,
because God is love . . .
We know and rely on the love God has for us.
God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God,
and God in them . . .”*
(1 JOHN 4:7–8, 16)

3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.⁸

Love—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (JOHN 15:12).

Significance—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me”
(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

Security—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge” (PROVERBS 14:26).

The Ultimate Need-Meeter

What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

Love—*“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

Significance—*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

Security—*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

Since actions are based on beliefs, boundaries reflect what we believe. If our beliefs are wrong, our subsequent thoughts and behaviors will be wrong, and our boundaries will also be wrong. In other words, bad boundaries result from faulty thoughts that come from wrong beliefs. It is always wise to give thought to the basis for your boundaries because what you think in your heart reveals what sort of person you are.

“As he thinks in his heart, so is he.”

(PROVERBS 23:7 NKJV)

WRONG BELIEF FOR LACK OF BOUNDARIES:

“If I set boundaries, I’ll push people away and never get the love and approval I need to feel good about myself. I just want to feel accepted and secure in my relationships.”

RIGHT BELIEF TO BE A BOUNDARY SETTER:

“I need to set beneficial boundaries and not live for the approval of others. This will help me establish healthy relationships. Because of my secure relationship with Christ, I know I am unconditionally loved and accepted.”

*“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us
and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*

(1 JOHN 4:10)

What Is God’s Ultimate Boundary?

Entering into a personal relationship with God is both *inclusive* and *exclusive*.

It is *inclusive* because anyone can come. All are welcome to enter into a relationship with God in which He is our heavenly Father and we are His children. No race, gender, age barriers, or socioeconomic divides keep us from becoming a child of the Most High God.

But the way to God is also *exclusive*. Don’t be deceived into thinking there are many paths to heaven or that all religions lead to an everlasting relationship with the Almighty. God Himself has set this boundary: The only way to a personal relationship with God and the only way to receive the free gift of eternal life is through Jesus, God the Son. Acts 4:12 is explicitly clear: *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”*

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

(ACTS 16:31)

4 Points of God’s Plan

Whether you’re trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you’ve done or what’s been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

1. God’s Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God’s motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus’ purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (JOHN 10:10).

2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God’s standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (ROMANS 6:23).

3. God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”* (ACTS 16:31).

4. Your Part: *Surrender*

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen
to go my own way instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross
to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me
the person you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)

STEPS TO SOLUTION



*“You need a plan while
you rely on God to help
you gain control
of your life.”*



It's New Year's Day and Allison finds herself in a bizarre, bone-chilling environment. But this has nothing to do with the weather.

Standing in her grown son's home, she's stunned by the scene around her. The contents of cabinets and drawers are strewn throughout the house and the pungent odor of alcohol bottles and charred smell of cigarette butts smothers her senses. Altogether it's breaking her heart. Sprayed shards of broken glass crackle underfoot from a smoke bomb, making the trek from one room to the next even more treacherous.

Everywhere Allison walks, she encounters trash and filth. She also discovers a glass aquarium housing two large boa constrictors, adding yet another dimension to the unsettling scene before her.

A dark, ominous sensation washes over Allison, and she finds herself reciting⁹ . . .

*"Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*

(PSALM 23:4)

Key Verse to Memorize

As Allison sifts through the contents of her son's house of horrors, she is sadly mindful of her encounter upon arriving. A SWAT team officer informs her that a team had swept through the premises and provided the following report: "The bust was good. . . . He's going to have a hard time getting out of this one."¹⁰

He is Allison's only child. He's both rebel and prodigal. He's no longer a tumultuous teenager, but an adult who never learned to live within healthy boundaries.

Allison can't imagine finding any more surprises in the squalor before her. Surely nothing more could shock her senses. At least that's

what she thinks. Allison draws on the strength of the Holy Spirit when she sees what is displayed in a lighted cabinet in the living room.¹¹

Gratefully, God's Word assures . . .

*"The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid,
but gives us power, love and self-discipline."*

(2 TIMOTHY 1:7)

Key Passage to Read

Is it? No, it *can't* be! Looking closer, Allison discovers an entire collection of Nazi memorabilia on display—a large swastika, arm bands, flags, helmets, belt buckles, and photos—all commemorating the most twisted and vile form of collective corruption. During its reign of terror, the Third Reich flagrantly violated all of God's commandments, seeking instead to establish its own dark kingdom with its own rules—all based on hate.

Anger fills Allison's wounded spirit. How could her son, her only child, who once professed faith in Jesus Christ, cross into such evil territory?¹²

Allison's anger is a legitimate response to her son's folly, for the Bible gives this specific instruction . . .

"Do not give the devil a foothold."

(EPHESIANS 4:27)

Boundaries in Life Romans 13:1-14

Boundaries are critical safeguards designed by God to govern every area of life. This principle is clearly expressed in the New Testament. When God established the church, He defined relational boundaries for all who would place their faith in Jesus Christ.

Obey the Governing Authorities

- We** are to be subject to all civil authorities
because they are established by Godv. 1
- We** are to submit to the authorities to avoid
punishment and to have a clear conscience..... v. 5
- We** are to pay taxes to the authorities because
they are full-time servants of God..... v. 6
- We** are to give to others what we owe them—
taxes, revenue, respect and honor v. 7

*“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities,
for there is no authority except that which God has established.
The authorities that exist have been established by God. . . .
Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities,
not only because of possible punishment
but also as a matter of conscience.
This is also why you pay taxes,
for the authorities are God’s servants,
who give their full time to governing.
Give to everyone what you owe them:
If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue;
if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”
(ROMANS 13:1, 5-7)*

Fulfill the Law through Love

- We** are to love others, leaving no debt except our continuing obligation to love everyone v. 8
- We** are to love people always because love meets every requirement of God v. 8
- We** are to love others because all of God’s commandments are based on love v. 9
- We** are to love others because love fulfills the law of God v. 10

*“Let no debt remain outstanding,
except the continuing debt to love one another,
for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.
The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’
‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not covet,’
and whatever other command there may be,
are summed up in this one command:
‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’
Love does no harm to a neighbor.
Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”*
(ROMANS 13:8–10)

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ

- We** are to love with a sense of urgency, keeping in mind that Christ’s return is near v. 11
- We** are to reject sinful ways and let Christ live through us since His coming is so near v. 12
- We** are to live not as though sin still reigns in our hearts, but as though Christ is here—because He *is here*, in each believer. v. 13
- We** are to submit to Christ’s rule over our lives rather than to sinful desiresv. 14

*“And do this, understanding the present time:
The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber,
because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.
The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.
So let us put aside the deeds of darkness
and put on the armor of light.
Let us behave decently, as in the daytime,
not in carousing and drunkenness,
not in sexual immorality and debauchery,
not in dissension and jealousy.
Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ,
and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.”*
(ROMANS 13:11–14)

How to Have a Transformed Life

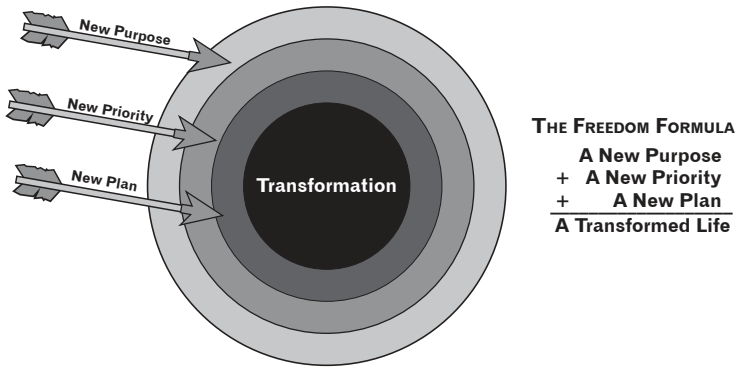
After surveying all of the damage and demented possessions of her prodigal, Allison Bottke makes a sobering observation: “Everywhere I looked was evidence of a life lived not on the edge, but somewhere deeper—in a pathetic pit of depravity. The tumor of [alcohol and drug] addiction, irresponsibility, recklessness, and crime could not be excised. It kept returning, each time more virulent than the last. The stench of a wasted life filled my nostrils.”¹⁵

What her son, Christopher, *desperately* needs and Allison *desperately* acknowledges, is a transformed life.

The Bible clearly warns . . .

*“The prudent see danger and take refuge,
but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.”*
(PROVERBS 27:12)

Reaching the Target: Transformation!



Target #1—A New Purpose

God's purpose for me is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

“Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (ROMANS 8:29).

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ.”

Target #2—A New Priority

God's priority for me is to change my thinking.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (ROMANS 12:2).

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God’s thinking.”

Target #3—A New Plan

God's plan for me is to rely on Christ’s strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength.”

My Personalized Plan Be a Boundary Builder

I'm setting my sights on living the transformed life God desires for me and has made available through the life of Jesus Christ within me. I will establish boundaries to help me become more Christlike in my relationships and to become more intimate in my walk with God.

I will . . .

B—Build healthy boundaries.

- God loves me and wants me to establish healthy boundaries.
- Recognize that it's never too late to begin learning how to set new boundaries.
- Accept that change can be difficult at times, but the Lord will guide me and be my strength.

"The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me" (PSALM 28:7).

O—Overcome the fear of others' disapproval of my boundaries.

- Personalize and memorize:

"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ" (GALATIANS 1:10).

- Personalize and memorize:

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (DEUTERONOMY 31:6).

- Personalize and memorize:

"We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts" (1 THESSALONIANS 2:4).

U—Understand that boundaries are biblical.

- God established boundaries from the beginning of time and creation.

- God has His own personal boundaries.
- God expects me to live my life according to the boundaries He has laid out for me in Scripture.

“I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy” (LEVITICUS 11:44).

N—Notify others of my boundaries (family, friends, coworkers).

- Recognize my resources and responsibilities.
- Communicate my convictions clearly.
- Share with compassion my reasons for establishing healthier boundaries.

“Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (EPHESIANS 4:15).

D—Develop relationships with people who have healthy boundaries.

- Seek people who have healthy boundaries.
- Ask God to bring mature people into my life to befriend and help me.
- Become more aware of personal boundary violations and address them directly.

“Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm” (PROVERBS 13:20).

A—Admit my limitations and keep on trying.

- Identify people who have violated my boundaries and forgive them.
- Ask forgiveness of those whose boundaries I have violated.
- Commit to starting over each time I fail

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

R—Realize my need to set and maintain new boundaries.

- The bonding process begun in infancy is a powerful influence in my life now. Even if it was inadequate, I can still build healthy boundaries as an adult.

- Identify and evaluate the boundaries formed in childhood and determine which ones may be counterproductive in my life now as an adult.
- Come up with a plan to replace the harmful boundaries formed in childhood with new, beneficial ones.

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland” (ISAIAH 43:18–19).

I—Identify healthy boundaries for myself and commit to maintaining them.

- Determine ahead of time what I will do if others cross my boundaries.
- Implement repercussions when my boundaries are crossed.
- Regularly review and evaluate the effectiveness of my boundaries.

“My words come from an upright heart; my lips sincerely speak what I know” (JOB 33:3).

E—Encourage my family members to establish and honor boundaries.

- Share with them my decision to establish healthy boundaries.
- Express my gratitude for their meaningful roles in my life.
- Invite them to join with me as I seek to please God and be the person He created me to be.

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had” (ROMANS 15:5).

S—See my identity in Christ.

- God chose me.
- God adopted me.
- God redeemed me.

“He chose us in him before the creation of the world . . . In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will . . . In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (EPHESIANS 1:4–7).

Setting Healthy Boundaries

Question: “How do I begin the process of setting healthy boundaries?”

Answer: Read your Bible and pray. These are two vital, spiritual components for determining how to live a life that is both pleasing to God and fulfilling for you. You must lay a solid foundation, and that foundation is the Word of God. Follow the example of others who have firmly established biblical boundaries. Seek their advice about where to start. Consider the following plan to begin building healthy boundaries.

- **Pray** for the Lord to clearly reveal your need and how to move forward.
- **Pinpoint** where your current boundaries are weak and need to be reinforced.
- **Prioritize** the people with whom you want to set boundaries. Identify the situations in which you need to set limits and don’t feel the need to tackle all of them at one time.
- **Partner** with someone who can hold you accountable to set and maintain your boundaries.
- **Prepare** to see changes in your relationships with others.
- **Permit** yourself to acknowledge successes internally. Boundary building is hard work.
- **Put together** a support system to minimize potential “danger zones” that can trigger old responses.

Commit your plans and efforts to God and begin the process of setting healthy boundaries.

*“May he give you the desire of your heart
and make all your plans succeed.”*

(PSALM 20:4)

Potential Angry Reactions from Others

Question: “How should I handle potential angry reactions from others when I attempt to set boundaries?”

Answer: There are typically two different methods people use to get others to do what they want them to do or to keep them from doing what they don’t want them to do—such as by setting boundaries. While they are referred to as games, nothing is fun about these methods.

The Guilt Game

As you establish healthy boundaries, others may try to make you feel guilty. This is false guilt. Hold your ground and set your boundaries anyway.

By establishing boundaries you may be accused of not loving others. This is false guilt. Explain that setting boundaries is loving and set your boundaries anyway.

If in building your boundaries, you begin to feel that others may not love you or if you question your own love for them, set your boundaries anyway and pray this passage:

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.

In God, whose word I praise—

in God I trust and am not afraid.

What can mere mortals do to me?”

(PSALM 56:3–4)

The Blame Game

As you establish boundaries to take charge of your life, you may find that others become angry adjusting to the new you. They may blame you for their poor behavior and try to force you to return to old ways of being manipulated and controlled through guilt. Clarify that their response to your boundaries is their choice and maintain your boundaries anyway.

Having healthy boundaries means not manipulating others and not being manipulated by others. Choose to not be manipulated and maintain your boundaries.

Be diligent to remember: A mind focused on the will of God will produce actions pleasing to God. Maintaining healthy boundaries is pleasing to God, so maintain your boundaries.

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is
—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

(ROMANS 12:2)

How to Build Healthy Boundaries

Even though her son, Christopher, is an adult, Allison Bottke can no longer deny her part in the downward spiral that characterizes his life.

For too many years she has been both mother and *enabler*—nurturing and protecting to a fault. Allison recognizes that her overly safeguarding control has not only sheltered Christopher from painful consequences but also prevented him from learning valuable life lessons. Her maternal enabling has also contributed to Christopher’s warped perception of reality, leading to excuses for allowing chaos to rule his life.

Sitting in a courtroom for her son’s arraignment hearing concerning the New Year’s Day debacle, Allison hears the charges read, a court date set, and bond announced at \$10,000. Only 10 percent is needed to release Christopher from custody, so the bail bondsman assures Allison, “If you can pay the \$1,000, we’ll have him out of here in no time.” Allison responds: “No.”

“No?” he inquires.

Allison affirms: “That’s correct.”¹⁴

The parental boundary stuns the bail bondsman and prompts Christopher to scowl. It’s been a long time coming, but Allison is determined to begin building healthy boundaries.¹⁵

The Bible provides direction for parents like Allison.

*“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God,
who gives generously to all
without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”*

(JAMES 1:5)

Six Steps for Success

You need a plan while you rely on God to help you gain control of your life. And it helps to have a counselor, mentor, pastor, or friend who will walk alongside you. As you continually face the challenges required to maintain healthy boundaries, remember . . .

*“Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run
and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”*

(ISAIAH 40:31)

1. Admit you have a problem and need a solution.

Acknowledge you’re the one who lacks boundaries and turn to God for help and insight.

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (PSALM 139:23–24).

2. Be aware there will be times when you want to resist the hard work of change.

Admit you've often been your own worst enemy even though you have placed blame elsewhere.

"You desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place" (PSALM 51:6).

3. Care about yourself.

Determine to leave others in God's care. Agree to let Him change you.

"With minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming" (1 PETER 1:13).

4. Don't try to set all new boundaries all at once.

Make small changes before you take on bigger challenges.

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (JAMES 1:2-4).

5. Enforce your boundaries consistently.

In your quest to become more Christlike, accept the challenge to maintain your boundaries. Even when it's difficult, it's still beneficial.

"Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come" (1 TIMOTHY 4:8 NLT).

6. Face the future and resist the urge to fall back into old, unhealthy patterns.

Acknowledge and grieve the losses that naturally occur with change as you seek to fulfill your God-given purpose.

"You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised" (HEBREWS 10:36).

Teach Healthy Boundaries

Question: “As a parent, how can I help my children develop healthy boundaries?”

Answer: Just as children learn to respect authority, they must also be taught how to build and maintain healthy boundaries. Consider these foundational elements necessary to develop healthy, appropriate boundaries with children.

Allow your children to say *No* and to hear *No* without fear of rejection or loss of love.

- If their *No* is justified, compliment them.
- If their *No* is unjustified, remain caring and calm as you correct them.
- If they rebel against your reasoning, address their rebellion but realize that they are still hearing the truth spoken in love. In time, the seeds of truth can take root and bear fruit. Jesus said . . .

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

(JOHN 8:32)

Bonding time with your infant is critically important, but bonding time at any age will strengthen your relationship. It is from this foundation of bonding that your child develops the ability to set healthy boundaries.

“God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.”

(1 JOHN 4:16)

Consequences are the logical and natural result of our actions. Your child needs to receive repercussions in response to unacceptable behavior. For example, if your child hurts someone, a repercussion could be for the child to do something kind for that person. If your child says hateful words, a logical repercussion could be for your child to ask for forgiveness and speak affirming words to the person they’ve hurt.

*“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.
A man reaps what he sows.
Whoever sows to please their flesh,
from the flesh will reap destruction;
whoever sows to please the Spirit,
from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”*
(GALATIANS 6:7–8)

Discipline grounded in love is basic training for boundary development. Discipline is teaching boundaries with rewards and repercussions, as well as being proactive in instructing and training your child to do the right thing.

*“All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful,
but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it,
afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”*
(HEBREWS 12:11 NASB)

Encouragement equips, energizes, and empowers children to feel loved. At the foundation of boundary setting is bonding, which is love. Unconditional love encourages children to form healthy boundaries.

“Encourage one another daily.”
(HEBREWS 3:13)

Set Healthy Boundaries

Question: “Why do I as a parent need to set boundaries for my children?”

Answer: Just as God set boundaries for Adam and Eve for their benefit and protection, you as a parent need to set boundaries for your children.

Boundaries demonstrate your loving care. As a parent, you should not feel guilty when setting and maintaining boundaries. You are loving well when you hold the line on limits.

*“Discipline your children, and they will give you peace;
they will bring you the delights you desire.”*

(PROVERBS 29:17)

Boundaries earn respect. Don't be afraid of losing your child's love by establishing boundaries. In following God's loving example, respect for your authority is a natural result of protective boundaries.

*“We have all had human fathers who disciplined us
and we respected them for it. How much more
should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!”*

(HEBREWS 12:9)

Boundaries are beneficial, not punitive. Don't look at boundaries as punishment. Healthy boundaries provide structure and security.

“Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!”

(PSALM 122:7 ESV)

Boundaries should be honored as a result of respect and trust, not because of coercion or force. Don't try to manipulate your child with threatening fear or guilt. Instead, rely on established rewards and repercussions to motivate your child to act responsibly.

*“Do not provoke your children to anger
by the way you treat them.
Rather, bring them up with the discipline
and instruction that comes from the Lord.”*

(EPHESIANS 6:4 NLT)

Boundaries are not detrimental, degrading, or demeaning. Upholding boundaries is a discipline. Learning to set and maintain boundaries is a beneficial and fundamental skill for your child to learn.

*“Whoever scorns instruction will pay for it,
but whoever respects a command is rewarded.”*

(PROVERBS 13:13)

Boundaries work in your child’s life much like a filter; they keep out harmful influences while allowing positive benefits to flow in.

*“If you say, ‘The LORD is my refuge,’
and you make the Most High your dwelling,
no harm will overtake you.”*

(PSALM 91:9–10)

Boundaries need to be altered or adapted as your child grows and matures. As your level of trust deepens, you may choose to loosen your boundaries accordingly. Remember to clearly communicate changes to the boundaries, rewards, and repercussions you set.

*“This command is a lamp, this teaching is a light,
and correction and instruction are the way to life.”*

(PROVERBS 6:23)

How to Practice Parental Boundaries

While boundaries are good and necessary for instilling self-discipline and self-control, most children and teenagers do not necessarily look on them from a positive perspective. Rather, they view them as stifling their freedom and spoiling their fun. It is not until they experience some of the true benefits of boundaries that they begin to embrace them and eventually adopt them as their own.

In the meantime, it is important to remember that most children have a keen sense of fairness and are quick to demand justice when they detect an unfair boundary or repercussion. Parents and other authority figures who are known for their fair-mindedness and impartiality will quickly gain the respect of the youth in their charge and will likely find them receptive to boundaries that are reasonable.

*“If a king judges the poor with fairness,
his throne will be established forever.”*

(PROVERBS 29:14)

Practicing Parental Boundaries

*“My son, keep your father’s command
and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.”*

(PROVERBS 6:20)

Do . . . Mold the will without breaking the spirit of your child.

- A child’s will is molded by applying appropriate boundaries when the child seeks to go in a direction that is contrary to God’s will.
- A child naturally desires to please and receive praise from parents; therefore, boundaries couched in affirming words of encouragement are generally well received.
- A child’s spirit is uplifted by being valued as a unique creation of God and by being treated with courtesy, kindness, fairness, and respect.

- A child’s spirit can be broken through overreacting or having too many rules, criticizing or teasing, false accusations or inflexibility, impatience or harsh punishment.

Example: A wild stallion has intrinsic value. Yet the most valuable horses can be turned with the slightest nudge from their riders’ reins. The goal of a trainer is to break the *will* of the horse, but not the *spirit*. Likewise, the goal of a parent should be to mold the will of a child without breaking their spirit.

*“Fathers, do not embitter your children,
or they will become discouraged.”*
(COLOSSIANS 3:21)

Do . . . Communicate your expectations clearly.

- Make eye contact with your child when communicating.
- Before problems occur, describe in detail what you expect of your child regarding structure and limits.
- Enter into an agreement with your older child or teen and ask for a statement verifying an accurate understanding of your expectations.
- When it’s time for your child to honor the boundary you have established, give them one gentle reminder.

Example:

Don’t say: “Don’t you think it’s time for you to do your homework now?”

Do say: “Remember, you agreed to start doing your homework at 7:00. It’s that time so what do you need to be doing now?”

“We instructed you how to live in order to please God.”
(1 THESSALONIANS 4:1)

Do . . . Encourage and develop responsibility.

- Allow your child to make age-appropriate choices and decisions.
- Permit your child to experience the repercussions of wrong choices and the rewards of right choices.

- Give increased freedom when your child acts responsibly.
- Restrict freedom when your child is irresponsible.

Example: Karl, age 17, is told, “You may take the car to the game and go out for pizza afterward, but don’t go anywhere else and be home by 11:30. If you’re not home by then, you won’t be allowed to use the car for two weeks.” If Karl disobeys, ask, “Where did you agree to go in the car and when did you agree to return home?”

“This agreement was made for your safety and for my peace of mind. So, by breaking our agreement, you’ve chosen to be without car privileges for the next two weeks.”

*“A foolish son brings grief to his father
and bitterness to the mother who bore him.”*

(PROVERBS 17:25)

Do . . . Assign beneficial chores with boundaries.

- Chores need to be clearly defined and detailed.
- Chores need to be assigned to everyone in the family based on age and capabilities.
- Chores need to be explained as helping the entire family and given an assigned time for completion.
- Chores need to be consistently enforced by making sure they are completed.

Example:

Don’t say: “Michael, you are to mow the lawn once a week.”

Do say: “Michael, since your responsibility is to take care of the yard before you leave each Saturday, please remember to use the edger around the curb and sidewalk. When you’ve finished, put the clippings in a yard bag and place it inside the trash can. Then clean and put the equipment where it belongs in the storage shed.”

*“All hard work brings a profit,
but mere talk leads only to poverty.”*

(PROVERBS 14:23)

Do . . . Establish negative repercussions for misbehavior.

- Before a problem arises, make sure your child understands that repercussions will be enforced when misbehavior occurs.
- Establish with your child appropriate repercussions of specific misbehaviors.
- When your child misbehaves, remind the child of the repercussion attached to the misbehavior.
- Allow your child to experience the repercussion for rejecting or violating a boundary.

Example: Tom, age 13, rides his bicycle with his friends on weekends and has agreed to never ride after dark. If Tom disobeys, he will not be allowed to join his friends the next time they go riding together on the weekend.

If he breaks his agreement a second time, the repercussion could be doubled, and he won't go riding with his friends for two weekends.

*“Discipline your children while there is hope.
Otherwise you will ruin their lives.”*
(PROVERBS 19:18 NLT)

Do . . . Reward positive behavior.

- Give your child an encouraging “thank you” and praise positive character traits.
“Thank you, your room looks great! I’m proud of you for finishing the job well.”
- Give your child recognition in front of others.
“Jim, I hope you’ve noticed how diligent Amy has been about practicing for the recital.”
- Give your child attention.
“Lisa, I heard that you’ve learned to dive from the diving board. I would love to see you do that sometime.”
- Give your child respect, smiles, and physical affection. Children need to be lovingly touched by their parents—with plenty of hugs, kisses, pats on the back, or a hand on the shoulder.

Example: “Chris, I respect your need for privacy. I won’t enter your room without knocking first, okay?”

*“God can testify how I long for all of you
with the affection of Christ Jesus.”*

(PHILIPPIANS 1:8)

Do . . . Maintain consistency.

- Only make promises you can keep and give careful thought to a request before granting or denying it.
- Refrain from requiring too many major changes at one time.
- Evaluate your boundaries and their rewards and repercussions on a regular basis.
- Both parents should agree to present a united front on issues regarding the child even if they disagree in private.

Example: When you and your spouse disagree on a repercussion, discuss the situation in private. Listen to each other as you share feelings and reasons for or against the correction. Come to an agreement or compromise to provide the security of consistency in your child’s life.

*“By wisdom a house is built,
and through understanding it is established;
through knowledge its rooms are filled
with rare and beautiful treasures.”*

(PROVERBS 24:3–4)

How to Communicate Boundary Changes

After Allison confirms she won’t bail Christopher out of jail, he scrounges together the funds needed to free himself temporarily. Shortly thereafter he makes his displeasure known to a family friend. Later, the friend says to Allison, “He said you put on quite a show in the courtroom . . . you cried so everyone would feel sorry for you.”¹⁶ These cutting words pierce Allison’s heart like a knife.

The inconceivable coldness of his cruel accusation motivates Allison to maintain boundaries that will help heal her wounded heart and hopefully transform Christopher's hardened heart.

Christopher's callousness reveals this sad reality of rebellion:

*"Everyone looks out for their own interests,
not those of Jesus Christ."*

(PHILIPPIANS 2:21)

Life is made up of different seasons that sometimes require transitional conversations to ease the discomfort often created by change. When grown children leave home, and especially when they get married, they enter a new season of life that not only impacts them but their parents as well.

During these times, relationships change out of necessity and may need to be redefined. Having loving conversations regarding boundary changes can be helpful and meaningful, encouraging growth and solidifying relationships.

If you realize that you have not made a healthy transition from your family of origin to your new family, you may need to set and communicate new boundaries.

In a Newlywed Relationship with Parents Who Lack Boundaries

Define your new relationship.

"Mom and dad, I love both of you. I'm thankful to have you as my parents and I'm grateful that I was raised by you. Now that I'm married, I am making a new family. Of course, we will still talk and visit. But there will be some changes in how we interact because I am establishing my own family."

State what is acceptable and what is not.

"It is not acceptable for you to talk with my family using unkind words or in a harsh, hurtful tone of voice. If you choose to cross this boundary, we will leave and get back together at another time."

Distinguish your new family from your family of origin.

“When I was a kid, we did things a certain way. We share some good memories, and I want to continue some of those same traditions for my family. But we are creating some of our own new patterns and traditions.”

In Your Marriage

Marriage is a covenant commitment between one man and one woman: *“The two will become one flesh”* (Mark 10:8). Boundaries are about defining your respective selves in the midst of this God-ordained union.

Marriage can become fertile ground for boundary issues to sprout and grow if not properly addressed. A healthy marriage consists of two complete people who together create an environment of love. They do not need each other in order to feel “complete,” but they share a loving union that God compares to our relationship with Christ.

State what you need.

“I love you and love our time together, but I also need time to be by myself.”

Establish boundaries about how you expect to be treated.

“I love you and want our marriage to work, but if you choose to treat me in this way, there will be consequences. If you _____, I will _____.”

Define what acceptable communication means to you:

“Please do not talk to me in a hurtful way. If you choose to speak to me disrespectfully, I will ask you to leave our home until you can speak in a kind voice. If you refuse, then I will leave temporarily.”

*“Do not let any unwholesome talk
come out of your mouths,
but only what is helpful for building
others up according to their needs,
that it may benefit those who listen.”*

(EPHESIANS 4:29)

In Your Friendships

Define your relationship.

“I’m glad we have so much in common, like our love of biking and exploring new places.”

Establish boundaries.

“It’s great that we can get together every other week for our outings. Let’s meet at my house Saturday after next and have breakfast together before starting our morning ride.”

Reinforce limitations.

“I’m sorry you can’t meet this week, but Saturday afternoon is the only time I have available.”

Maintain boundaries.

“I really can’t meet another day this week, so let’s postpone until next time.”

*“The righteous choose their friends carefully,
but the way of the wicked leads them astray.”*

(PROVERBS 12:26)

In Your Parenting

Establish limits.

“Please use your *inside voice* when you play in our home and your *outside voice* when you play in the yard.”

Define repercussions.

“If you choose to _____, the repercussion is _____.”

Train for delayed gratification.

“I know you want this toy now, but you will have to wait until you have saved up enough money from doing chores.”

Explain appropriate behavior.

“In our family we do not hit each other. Because each of us is a gift from God, we love one another.”

“Children are a gift of the LORD.”

(PSALM 127:3 NLT)

In Your Workplace

Stay within the parameters of your job description.

“I was hired to do a specific job. Now I’m being asked to do things that are not part of that original agreement. I understand extra assignments will arise on occasion, but this extra time is becoming the ‘norm’ and not the exception. I feel I have been asked to take on more responsibilities than I was hired to perform. Can we talk about my job description, expectations, and level of compensation?”

Define your work space.

“I need to complete many time-sensitive tasks, and it’s important that I finish my work while I’m here. I am happy to schedule a time to discuss collaborative projects. Thank you for respecting my time and working together as a team.”

Work within the boundaries of your hours.

“Please know how grateful I am for all that I’ve learned since I’ve been here and for the opportunity to contribute to (name). I need to discuss an important issue with you. (State request.) I was hired to work ‘X’ number of hours each week. I understand there will be occasional emergencies or deadlines. I want to be a team player, but four out of the last six weeks I’ve worked overtime. My work is important to me, but so is my family. How can we work together to achieve a healthy work/family balance?”

*“To the one who works, wages are not credited
as a gift but as an obligation.”*

(ROMANS 4:4).

How to Respond When Boundary Lines Are Crossed

Despite Allison Bottke’s resolve to love her son without taking responsibility from him, a litany of excuses threatens to destabilize the boundaries she establishes for Christopher. She is forced to prepare a firm response for attempted infractions.

Concerning the turmoil still characterizing Christopher's life, Allison lends a listening ear rather than extending a helping hand. She no longer rushes to rescue Christopher from every crisis or protect him from pain. Pain is precisely how God achieves some of His best work—His transforming work.¹⁷

Scripture promises . . .

*“The fruit of that righteousness will be peace;
its effect will be quietness and confidence forever.”*
(ISAIAH 32:17)

We all have physical, moral, and personal boundaries that should not be violated. Do you know your specific boundaries? Do you know where to draw the line? Do you know how to respond when your boundary lines get trampled? The following responses will help you alert those in your life who verbally and emotionally cross the line. Don't let fear keep you from enforcing your boundaries.

*“Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.”*
(PROVERBS 29:25)

Inform: “Do you realize how loudly you are speaking?”

— “Do you know how your words sound?”

— “Do you know you are saying things that make me feel uncomfortable?”

Identify: “Please lower your voice.”

— “Please don't use that kind of language.”

— “Please explain your anger.”

Implore: “Stop insulting me with your words.”

— “Stop your painful outbursts.”

— “Stop hurting me in this way.”

Insist: “You must stop speaking to me in that tone of voice.”

- “You may not continue to hurt me in this way.”
- “You will have to change your way of communicating with me.”

Instruct: “This is how I would like you to speak to me.”

- “When you communicate with me, this is what I will expect . . .”
- “When you (name behavior), it hurts me. This is what I want you to do . . .”

Invite: “I am open to working this out with you when we can talk calmly and reasonably.”

- “I care about you and our relationship, but the way you communicate with me needs to change.”
- “I’m willing to go to counseling together, if you are agreeable to that.”

Impact: “I am leaving now in order to protect myself.”

- “Because this behavior is unacceptable to me, I am going to distance myself from you for a short time.”
- “I will be away for (hours) to give each of us time/space to cool down and give some thought to our problem. I will be back to resolve this conflict peacefully and respectfully at that time.”

Although verbal boundaries can be difficult to establish and may appear wounding to someone who is emotionally upset and unwilling to assume responsibility for hurtful actions, they are necessary for healing. These words from King Solomon emphasize this reality:

*“Wounds from a friend can be trusted,
but an enemy multiplies kisses.”*

(PROVERBS 27:6)

How to Maintain Your Boundaries

The flow of money from Allison’s hand to Christopher’s has stopped.

She also recognizes that her supplying things into his life must be curtailed as well—things that, after all, cost her money. Allison chooses to maintain boundaries to teach Christopher responsibility and to protect her own heart from continual pain resulting from a dysfunctional dynamic.

Christopher repeatedly tells his mom everything will be “okay,” but she wants much more for him than “okay.”¹⁸ Allison knows from experience that boundaries will help Christopher build a better life. Ultimately, the answers for Christopher will come from his relationship with God and his dependence on Him, not his mother. Allison knows she must stop being an obstacle to her son’s need for the Lord, and she acknowledges this truth: “I’ve often said this: When I stopped trying to be God in my son’s life, he found God.”¹⁹

Scripture teaches . . .

*“Whoever scorns instruction will pay for it,
but whoever respects a command is rewarded.”*

(PROVERBS 13:13)

Maintaining Boundaries

After you establish boundaries, it is common for those around you to test them to see whether you really intend to maintain them. These people have been accustomed to getting what they want, so they may try to get you to revert back to your past behavior. Remember this counsel from God’s Word:

*“My son, keep my words and store
up my commands within you.
Keep my commands and you will live;
guard my teachings as the apple of your eye.
Bind them on your fingers; write them
on the tablet of your heart.
Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister,’
and to insight, ‘You are my relative.’”*
(PROVERBS 7:1–4)

Pay attention to your feelings and watch for early warning signs that you are beginning to lose sight of your boundaries.

- Remind yourself why you set the boundary in the first place.

“I set this boundary because ____.”

- Remember, repercussions are good. They are established because some people may try to overstep your boundaries.
- Rehearse what the Word of God says.

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love” (1 CORINTHIANS 16:13–14).

Plan ahead by role playing with a friend or even by yourself in front of a mirror on how to say *No*.

- Begin with simple situations where saying *No* has less impact; for example, saying *No* to a telemarketer who calls. “I’m sorry, but I must say *No*. Goodbye.” If the telemarketer persists say, “I really am not interested,” and hang up the phone.
- Be aware of how you feel after hanging up the phone. Thank God by reaffirming that it was good for the boundary to be set.
- Believe that as you continue to enforce your boundaries, it will become easier to maintain them through self-control.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (GALATIANS 5:22–23).

Recognize that the guilty feelings you may have over setting appropriate boundaries is false guilt. It is healthy for you to establish and maintain personal boundaries.

- Appreciate the importance of consistency with your boundaries, helping others honor them by maintaining and enforcing them.
- Apply the repercussion when your boundary has been violated.
- Always keep the end goal in mind as you persevere.

“Whoever disregards discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored” (PROVERBS 13:18).

Rejoice as you continue to keep your personal boundaries and find yourself set free.

- Trust that God will give you strength for this journey.
- Recognize that boundaries are important to others also and are not negative. Personal boundaries are set to protect, not to offend.
- Thank God that He has given you tremendous value by sacrificing His only Son for you. And as His child, you are worthy of protecting yourself with boundaries.

“Rejoice always . . . give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 THESSALONIANS 5:16, 18).

It’s said that good fences make good neighbors by designating property lines and marking boundaries. A good fence is designed to keep out unwanted intrusions and form a protective shield for those inside. For a fence to not be a prison, a gate is required, allowing access and admittance when open, but providing protection when closed.

Jesus says . . .

*“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.
They will come in and go out, and find pasture.”*
(JOHN 10:9)

Frequently Asked Questions

Rejected by In-Laws

Question: “My parents have rejected my wife since the day we were married. They exclude her from family functions. I go without her to weddings, birthdays, and graduations. What can I do to help my parents learn to accept my wife?”

Answer: As her husband, you are called to love your wife sacrificially as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). A tangible way to express your love for her is through actions that convey you value and cherish her and are even willing to “lay your life down” for her. Until now, you have been accepting of your parents’ hurtful choice to exclude your wife from family functions.

For your parents to accept your wife, they need a motivating “reason” to accept her. Presently they have no motivation because no repercussions have been attached to excluding her. As long as you attend family functions without your wife, you are communicating approval of your parents’ disapproval of her. This is dishonoring to your wife. As a member of the family, it’s only right that she also be invited to family functions.

Therefore, you must explain to your parents that in the future they must accept your wife, whom you love, and explain that you will *both* attend functions or you will *both* stay home. You must be consistent 100 percent of the time, unless you or your wife are truly unable to attend.

Consider conveying to your parents the concepts communicated in the following statements:

- “I love my family very much and want to attend family occasions, but because I’m married, my wife is part

of our family and should be included in our family functions as well.”

- “Since the two of us are united as one, if you don’t accept my wife, then you don’t accept me.”
- “When you disrespect my wife by excluding her, you are also showing disrespect to me because she is my choice for a lifelong mate.”
- “Beginning today, I expect my wife to be included in our family get-togethers and for her to be treated with respect or we will both stay home. Ultimately, the choice is yours.”

Finally, apologize to your wife for not supporting her in the past by setting appropriate boundaries with your parents. The Bible presents the following principle in both the Old and New Testaments, in four different books of the Bible—Genesis, Matthew, Mark, and Ephesians:

*“A man will leave his father and mother
and be united to his wife,
and the two will become one flesh.”*
(EPHESIANS 5:31)

Tough Love for Teens

Question: “I had my teenage son arrested and jailed after he was repeatedly caught drinking with some of his friends. Did I handle this situation correctly?”

Answer: Yes, although this was a difficult decision to make, you probably made a wise choice. Consider these reasons for letting your son spend time in jail:

- Underage drinking is illegal. He broke the law.

- When a person is in the wrong, they need to suffer the natural repercussion of their wrong behavior. The pain of the offense needs to outweigh the pleasure of the sin.
- As a parent who loves your son, you have the responsibility to discipline your son and correct his behavior. Sometimes love must be tough, even though it can be hard on you.

Look at the heart of this insightful scripture: *“The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ... No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it”* (Hebrews 12:6–7, 11).

Remember . . .

*“Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way
will save them from death
and cover over a multitude of sins.”*

(JAMES 5:20)



SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



*“First seek the counsel
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

How can I know **what God's will is** for me?

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve **what
God's will is**—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

(ROMANS 12:2)

What **things** should I **think about** all the time,
including when considering boundaries?

*“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true,
whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—
if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—
think about such **things**.”*

(PHILIPPIANS 4:8)

How can I **stand firm** and be **set free**
instead of being **burdened**?

*“It is for freedom that Christ has **set us free**.
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves
be **burdened** again by a yoke of slavery.”*

(GALATIANS 5:1)

Why shouldn't I **fear punishment**?

*“There is no fear in love.
But perfect love drives out fear,
because **fear** has to do with **punishment**.
The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”*

(1 JOHN 4:18)

Does the **Spirit God gave me** make me **timid**
or give me **power, love, and self-discipline?**

*“For the **Spirit God gave us** does not **make us timid**,
but gives us **power, love and self-discipline.**”*

(2 TIMOTHY 1:7)

How can I **demolish arguments**
and **take every thought captive?**

*“We **demolish arguments** and every pretension
that sets itself up against the knowledge of God,
and we **take captive every thought**
to make it obedient to Christ.”*

(2 CORINTHIANS 10:5)

Can I serve **Christ** if I am **trying to please**
people and **win their approval?**

*“Am I now trying to **win the approval**
of human beings, or of God?
Or am I **trying to please people?**
If I were still trying to please people,
I would not be a servant of **Christ.**”*

(GALATIANS 1:10)

Since I have been **approved by God**,
should I try to **please people** or **God?**

*“We speak as those **approved by God**
to be entrusted with the gospel.
We are not trying to **please people** but **God**,
who tests our hearts.”*

(1 THESSALONIANS 2:4)

Why should I **forget the past?**

*“**Forget** the former things;
do not dwell on **the past**.
See, I am doing a new thing!”*

(ISAIAH 43:18–19)

To whom must **each of us give an account of ourselves?**

“Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.”

(ROMANS 14:12)



ENDNOTES & BIBLIOGRAPHY



ENDNOTES

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7. For more on the three inner needs (or longings), see Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., *Understanding People: Why We Long for Relationship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 17–18, 124–127; Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance: Seeing Your True Worth through God's Eyes*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 6–11, 21–24.
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‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”
(Jeremiah 29:11)*

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