

Biblical Boundaries Study - Ashley

What are Personal Boundaries?

Personal boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves within relationships. A person with healthy boundaries can say “no” to others when they want to, but they are also comfortable opening themselves up to intimacy and close relationships.

A person who always keeps others at a distance (whether emotionally, physically, or otherwise) is said to have **rigid boundaries**. Alternatively, someone who tends to get too involved with others has **porous boundaries**.

- Most people have a mix of different boundary types.
 - For example, someone could have healthy boundaries at work, porous boundaries in romantic relationships, and a mix of all three types with their family.
- The appropriateness of boundaries depends heavily on setting.
 - What’s appropriate to say when you’re out with friends might not be appropriate when you’re at work.
- Some cultures have very different expectations when it comes to boundaries.
 - For example, in some cultures it’s considered wildly inappropriate to express emotions publicly. In other cultures, emotional expression is encouraged.

Types of Boundaries:

- Physical boundaries
- Intellectual boundaries
- Emotional boundaries
- Sexual boundaries
- Material boundaries
- Time boundaries

Notes from “Boundaries” by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend:

- Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begin, leading me to a sense of ownership. Taking responsibility for my life opens up many different options. However, if I do not “own” my life, my choices and options become very limited.

- In the physical world, boundaries are easy to see. Fences, signs, walls, moats with alligators, manicured lawns, and hedges are all physical boundaries. If their differing appearances, they give the same message: This is where my property begins.” The owner of the property is legally responsible for what happens on his or her property. Nonowners are not responsible for the property.
- In our desperation to do the right thing or avoid conflict, we often end up taking on problems that God never intended us to take on.
- Trying harder, being nicer, and taking responsibility for others doesn’t make our lives work better.
- Boundaries are a “property line.” Their purpose is to help us know what we are responsible for and what we are not responsible for.
- The functions of a boundary are to: keep good in and bad out, act as an alarm system, help us to withdraw, and protect our freedom.
- Examples of boundaries include: skin/body, words (truth), geographical distance, time, emotional distance, and other people.

“Laws” of Boundaries:

- 1) We are personally responsible for our own actions and consequences of those actions.
- 2) We are responsible for our own feelings, actions, and behaviors. When we take responsibility for someone else, we keep them in an immature state.
- 3) We cannot change anybody else, but we can change ourselves with God’s help.
- 4) We need to learn to hear other people’s no.
- 5) Boundaries help us gain control of our own lives and fulfill what we were created for - love. When we have the proper motivation, we experience freedom and responsibility.

What do the following Scriptures say about boundaries?

- **Proverbs 4:23** - Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.
- **Proverbs 22:3** - The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.
- **Matthew 7:7-12** - “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 “Which of you, if your son asks

for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! 12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

- **Matthew 22:37-39** - Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’
- **Galatians 6:2-5 - 2** - Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. 4 Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, 5 for each one should carry their own load.

A lack of boundaries produces a variety of “bad fruit:”

These show up in three main areas of life:

- 1) **Clinical symptoms include:** depression, resentment, rage or anger, obsessive and compulsive behaviors, etc.
- 2) **Relational symptoms stem from:** a sense of loss of freedom and loss of love.
- 3) **Functional symptoms include:** inability to complete a goal or task, extreme disorganization, low energy level, and problems of concentration.

1) Clinical Symptoms:

- **Proverbs 13:12** - Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.
- **Matthew 5:6** - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- **Galatians 5:1** - 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.
- **Proverbs 25:28** - Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.

2) Relational Symptoms:

- **Matthew 14:13** - When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.

- **Matthew 6:34** - Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.
- **1 John 4:18** - here 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.

3) Functional Symptoms:

- **Genesis 1:27** - So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- **Ephesians 2:10** - For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
- **Romans 12:4-8** - For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your[a] faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.
- **Philippians 2:12-13** - Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.
- **2 Corinthians 9:7** - Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Scripture Examples:

1) Matthew 19:16-22. What is Jesus modeling about boundaries?

The Rich and the Kingdom of God

- **Matthew 19:16-22** - ¹⁶ Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" ¹⁷ "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." ¹⁸ "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" ²⁰ "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" ²¹ Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have

treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

2) John 2:13-17 What boundaries did Jesus have? What can you learn from this passage about your boundaries?

Jesus Clears the Temple Courts

- **John 2:13-17** - ¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

3) Ephesians 4:2-7 What are some ideas in these verses that you can apply to your own boundaries?

- **Ephesians 4:2-7**- ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

Discussion Questions:

- Where are the healthy boundaries in my life?
- Where are the unhealthy boundaries in my life?
- In what ways can we develop healthy boundaries while at the same time caring for others in a Christ-like manner?
- Was there any concept here that seemed new or confusing to you?
- Is the idea of boundaries easy or difficult to apply to your own life?

Other Scriptures:

- Matthew 5:3-6
- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

- Proverbs 4:23 Matthew 6:21
- Proverbs 6:16-19
- Matthew 13:45-46
- Matthew 18:15-17
- 2 Corinthians 5:10
- Proverbs 22:3

Tips for Healthy Boundaries:

Know your limits.

Before becoming involved in a situation, know what's acceptable to you, and what isn't. It's best to be *as specific as possible*, or you might be pulled into the trap of giving just a little bit more, over and over, until you've given far too much.

Know your values.

Every person's limits are different, and they're often determined by their personal values. For example, if you value family above all else, this might lead to stricter limits on how late you will stay at work, away from family. Know what's most important to you, and protect it.

Listen to your emotions.

If you notice feelings of discomfort or resentment, don't bury them. Try to understand what your feelings are telling you. Resentment, for example, can often be traced to feelings of being taken advantage of.

Have self-respect.

If you always give in to others, ask if you are showing as much respect to yourself as you show to others. Boundaries that are too open might be due to misguided attempts to be liked by elevating other people's needs above one's own.

Have respect for others.

Be sure that your actions are not self-serving, at the expense of others. Interactions should not be about winning, or taking as much as possible. Instead, consider what's fair to everyone, given the setting and relationship. You might "win", but at the cost of a relationship's long-term health.

Be assertive.

When you know it's time to set a boundary, don't be shy. Say "no" respectfully, but without ambiguity. If you can make a compromise while respecting your own boundaries, try it. This is a good way to soften the "no", while showing respect to everyone involved.

Consider the long view.

Some days you will give more than you take, and other days you will take more than you give. Be willing to take a longer view of relationships, when appropriate. But if you're *always* the one who's giving or taking, there might be a problem.

Resources:

- Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend - book "Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life"
- Dr. Anita Phillips - podcast "Turn the Light On;" social worker.
- Dr. Caroline Leaf - book "A Perfect You" - A little deep but Biblical; she is a neuroscientist and she has a podcast.
- Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith, MD - book Sacred Rest; medical doctor.
- TherapistAid.com