

Boundaries

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Boundaries

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Boundaries

Introduction

There is a word many of us were never taught to say comfortably: no.

We were raised to be kind, to be helpful, to put others first — and somewhere along the way, many of us confused selflessness with self-erasure. We said yes when we meant no. We carried burdens that weren't ours. We let people in who drained us dry and kept out those who could have filled us up. And we called it godliness.

This book is an invitation to reconsider.

Boundaries is not a concept borrowed from secular psychology and awkwardly patched onto Scripture. As you will discover in the pages that follow, God has been in the business of setting boundaries since before the foundations of the earth — separating light from darkness, land from sea, time from eternity. He placed limits around our responsibilities, our relationships, our bodies, and our thoughts, not to cage us, but to protect and define us.

And yet, if boundaries are so clearly woven into the fabric of creation and Scripture, why do so many of us struggle to establish and maintain them in our own lives?

That is the question this study sets out to answer.

Drawing on the timeless wisdom of God's Word and the profound work of Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, we will explore what healthy boundaries look like — and what happens when they are absent. We will look honestly at the patterns we have developed: the compliancy that keeps the peace at the cost of our souls, the walls of avoidance that keep out the good along with the bad, the quiet manipulation that masquerades as love, and the neglect that mistakes withdrawal for strength.

Most importantly, we will look at Jesus — the most boundaried person who ever lived — and learn from the way He moved through the world: with love that was fierce and free, with compassion that never became co-dependency, with truth that was never weaponized and grace that was never exploited.

This is not simply a study about protecting yourself. It is about becoming whole. It is about learning to steward the extraordinary gift of yourself — your feelings, your time, your talents, your calling — with the same care and intentionality that God has always shown toward you.

Welcome to the work. It will be uncomfortable at times. It will require honesty. But on the other side of that discomfort is something you may not have tasted in a long time: Freedom.

Boundaries

BOUNDARIES

Definition:

General: Something that indicates or fixes a limit or extent.

Hebrew/biblical root: The word translated as "border" in the KJV comes from a Hebrew root meaning to *"set bounds about"* — the idea of enclosing or defining a territory.

In the broader context, a boundary is essentially anything that defines where one thing ends and another begins — whether that's physical space, responsibility, relationships, thoughts, or identity. Boundaries aren't a modern psychological invention but are built into the very structure of creation and Scripture.

The KJV doesn't use the word boundary, but border. The Hebrew word used most of the time speaks of borders, to inclose the territory, and it's from a root word that means to "set bounds about".

Scriptural examples of boundaries

In Genesis 1: 1 – 10 (ESV) we see that God sets physical boundaries for space and time. God separated light and darkness, water from water, and water from land. Then He set the boundaries between heaven and earth.

In Genesis 2: 2, 3 (ESV) we read that God put a boundary between workdays and rest days, and He called it good.

Galatians 6: 5 (AMP) reads: *"For every person will have to bear [with patience] his own burden [of faults and shortcomings for which he alone is responsible]."* God sets a boundary around responsibility – who takes care of what is clearly defined.

2 Corinthians 6:5 (AMP) is a scripture that defines a boundary around our relationships, when it says: *"Do not be unequally bound together with unbelievers [do not make mismatched alliances with them, inconsistent with your faith]. For what partnership can righteousness have with lawlessness? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"*

Proverbs 25:17 teaches us boundaries around social interactions. *"Let your foot seldom be in your neighbour's house, Or he will become tired of you and hate you."*

Acts 17: 26 says: "And He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their lands *and* territories." This scripture is an example of how God sets a boundary around the level of control we have over our lives.

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Philippians 4:8 "Finally, believers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable *and* worthy of respect, whatever is right *and* confirmed by God's word, whatever is pure *and* wholesome, whatever is lovely *and* brings peace, whatever is admirable *and* of good repute; if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think *continually* on these things [centre your mind on them, and implant them in your heart!]." Here God exhorts us to put boundaries around our thoughts and the things we meditate on.

God puts boundaries around our desires. One example is Matthew 5:28 "**but** I say to you that everyone who [so much as] looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

In Titus 3:10 (AMP), which reads: "After a first and second warning reject a divisive man [who promotes heresy and causes dissension—ban him from your fellowship and have nothing more to do with him!]," God warns us to keep a boundary around the peace and unity of the body

1 Corinthians 15:33 "Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." Here it is evident that God puts a boundary around our holiness.

Now that we have established that having boundaries, setting boundaries and respecting boundaries are not only scriptural, but actually expected of us, let move on and ponder a question. If God is the author and the enforcer of boundaries, why are we so hesitant or reluctant to set or enforce boundaries for ourselves and/or for others?



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BOUNDARIES AND CO-DEPENDENCY

Definition of co-dependency: a psychological condition or a relationship in which a person manifesting low self-esteem and a strong desire for approval, has an unhealthy attachment to another, often controlling or manipulative person (such as a person with an addiction to alcohol or drugs).

Broadly speaking, it's a dependence to be needed or controlled by another.

Co-dependent relationships often develop gradually, making them difficult to recognise from the inside. The co-dependent person may genuinely believe they are simply being loving, loyal, or supportive — when in reality, their sense of identity and worth has become entirely wrapped up in the other person's needs, moods, and behaviour. Over time, this dynamic can erode their own desires, values, and wellbeing, leaving them feeling empty, resentful, or lost without the relationship to define them.

This is where healthy boundaries become essential. A boundary is not a wall or an act of selfishness — it is a clear definition of where one person ends, and another begins. Boundaries communicate what is acceptable and what is not, and they protect both people in a relationship. For someone recovering from co-dependency, learning to set and hold boundaries is often one of the most challenging yet transformative steps they can take. It requires a shift from asking "what do they need from me?" to asking "what do I need, and what am I willing to give?"

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JESUS, OUR EXEMPLAR

Scripture reference: John 10: 1 – 18

As you meditate on Jesus, consider Him through the lens of the Good Shepherd — not only as someone who loves and leads His people, but as someone who modelled what it looks like to be a boundary-maker and a boundary-keeper. John 10:1–18 paints a beautiful picture of a shepherd who knows exactly who He is, who His sheep are, and what He will and won't do. His identity was never up for negotiation.

We see this played out again and again throughout the Gospels. When the demands of the crowds became overwhelming, Jesus didn't just push through out of obligation — He withdrew. Luke 5:16 tells us He regularly slipped away to quiet places to pray. When a hostile crowd in Nazareth tried to throw Him off a cliff in Luke 4:28–30, He didn't argue or defend Himself — He simply walked through the crowd and went on His way. When His own family came looking for Him in Matthew 12:46–50, seemingly expecting preferential treatment, He gently but clearly redefined what true relationship with Him looked like.

Jesus also knew how to handle the traps people set for Him. When the religious leaders tried to catch Him out with baiting questions in Matthew 21:23–27 and Matthew 22:15–22, He didn't take the bait. When Herod wanted to satisfy his curiosity and treated the moment like entertainment, Jesus simply stayed silent — Luke 23:8–9. When Peter tried to manipulate Him away from the path of the cross, Jesus addressed it directly and firmly in Matthew 16:23. And when the people of His hometown let their pride and familiarity close their hearts to Him, Matthew 13:58 tells us He didn't force the issue — He simply didn't do many miracles there.

Just as striking as the way Jesus held His own boundaries is the way He respected the boundaries of others. In Matthew 20:29–34, when the mother of James and John came to Him with an ambitious request for her sons, Jesus didn't shame her — but He was honest, telling her that it wasn't His to give. And when two blind men called out to Him, He stopped and asked them directly, *"What do you want me to do for you?"* He didn't assume. In John 5:1–14, at the pool of Bethesda, He approached a man who had been lying there for 38 years and asked him, *"Do you want to get well?"* — a question that might seem obvious, but wasn't.

In all of these moments we see the same truth: Jesus waited for people to name their own need. He was a Saviour, not a rescuer. There is a profound difference between the two. A rescuer jumps in, takes over, and often enables. A Saviour sees the person, honours their will, and invites them into their own healing. For those of us learning to recognise co-dependency in ourselves, that distinction is everything.

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Practical Application

So, what does it actually look like to follow Jesus' example in our own relationships? The first and perhaps most important step is to get honest with yourself. Co-dependency thrives in the shadows — in the stories we tell ourselves about why we do what we do. "I just care deeply." "They need me." "If I don't help, no one will." These thoughts aren't always wrong, but when they become the thing that drives us, it's worth pausing and asking — am I doing this out of love, or out of a need to be needed?

Jesus knew who He was before He ever stepped into a conversation, a confrontation, or a crowd. That security — that settled sense of identity — is what made it possible for Him to respond rather than react. For us, that same security can only come from understanding who we are in God. Not who we are to other people. Not what we do for them, or how much they need us. When we begin to root our identity in our relationship with God rather than in our relationships with people, we start to find that we have something to give from — rather than constantly running on empty.

From that place, setting boundaries begins to feel less like rejection and more like honesty. It becomes possible to say "I can't do that" without guilt, or "that's not okay with me" without fear. Like Jesus walking calmly through the angry crowd in Nazareth, we don't have to be swept along by other people's emotions, demands, or expectations. We can be present with people in their pain without taking ownership of it. We can love someone deeply and still recognise that we are not responsible for fixing them.

It's also worth remembering that Jesus asked people what they wanted. He didn't assume, and He didn't project. In our own relationships, this is a powerful habit to develop — asking rather than assuming and allowing people the dignity of naming their own needs. It keeps us from slipping into the role of rescuer, and it honours the other person as someone capable of knowing and expressing what they need.

None of this is easy, especially if you've spent years in relationships where your needs came last, or where love always felt conditional. But healing is possible. Boundaries can be learned. And the same Jesus who asked the man at Bethesda "do you want to get well?" is asking you the very same question today.

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BOUNDARY PROBLEMS

Boundary problems are not limited to those who can't say no. As the saying goes, there are many ways to bake a cake, or in this case, to burn a cake. Let's explore some problematic personalities.

Compliants

Compliants are people who say yes to the bad thing.

When parents teach their children that it's bad to say "no," they are teaching them that others can do to them what they want. This leaves a person defenseless against the evil of manipulating, controlling, exploitative people, peer pressure, and temptation.

Compliants are chameleons, who say yes to anything that would keep the peace, avoid conflict and who often fail to recognize evil. In contrast, the Word of God is clear, when it states: Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil. (Matthew 5:37 ESV)

People comply for various reasons, usually because of fear...namely the fear of hurting someone's feelings, fear of abandonment or rejection, fearing someone's anger, fear of punishment, the fear of being shamed, fear of being seen as bad or selfish, fear of being ungodly, the fear of one's overstrict or critical conscience or a wish to be totally dependent on another.

Avoidants

Avoidants are people who say no to the good thing.

Avoidants say no to the good, they are unable to ask for help, they don't recognize their own needs and won't let others in. They withdraw when they are in need, and they do not ask for support from others. Their boundaries aren't fences; they are walls. It lets in neither good nor bad, as they have built a fortress around themselves. They experience their legitimate problems, needs and wants as something bad, destructive, and shameful. Avoidants will gladly give someone 5 hours of their time but is hesitant to ask for 10 minutes of theirs in return.

God doesn't violate our boundaries. He asks us to trust Him enough to let Him in. He says: *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."* Revelation 3: 20

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Controllers:

These are the people that do not respect other people's boundaries.

To a controller, "no" is simply an invitation to change someone else's mind. They don't respect other people's limits, borders, and boundaries. Instead of taking control of their own lives, they control the lives of others. In their minds "no" means maybe and "maybe" means yes. They come across as bullies, manipulative and aggressive. They also tend to make other people responsible for their lives.

We can distinguish between two types of Controllers:

Aggressive controllers:

Aggressive controllers are like bulldozers. They just don't regard or consider other people's boundaries, often not even comprehending that people would have boundaries. They can be verbally or physically abusive.

Manipulative controllers:

These ones have a hidden agenda and try to persuade people out of their boundaries. They talk others into a "yes" and indirectly manipulate circumstances to get their way. They will use seduction, guilt trips, and shame to get the result they want.

Compliants and Avoidants can also be controllers, but usually they will resort to manipulation, rather than aggression to get their way.

Controllers are undisciplined people; they struggle with delaying gratification. They want what they want, and they want it now. They struggle to hear "no" from others because they cannot say "no" to themselves. The only remedy for a controller is to allow them to experience the consequences for their actions...isolation. Controllers rarely feel loved because their actions drive people away, so they resort to more controlling behaviour to keep people close.

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Non-responsives:

These are the ones who are unable to understand the needs of others.

While we shouldn't take responsibility for others' feelings, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors, we have a responsibility to others. Connecting emotionally with people we are in relationship with is a responsibility, therefore if we don't respond to another's feelings it's a form of neglect. Within certain limits, we are to take care of each other's needs.

Nonresponsives fall into two categories. There are those who are critical of other people's needs, and there are those who are so absorbed by their own desires and needs that they are incapable of recognizing the needs of others. This is a form of narcissism and is in stark contrast to the Word of God.

Philippians 2:3-4 speaks to this, when Paul urges believers to do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility to consider others more significant than themselves, looking not only to their own interests but also to the interests of others.

Romans 12:10 calls believers to love one another with brotherly affection and to *outdo one another in showing honour*. This striking phrase encourages believers to prefer others above self.

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MORE THOUGHTS ON BOUNDARIES

The rule of thumb is if you want others to respect and hear your NO, you must respect and hear their NO.

One practical way of gently confronting someone who insist on "helping" when you do not invite or need help, is to say, "you can help me by hearing my NO."

Boundaries define who we are, and who we are not and good, safe boundaries prevent resentment. They communicate "I love you, but I also love myself." Setting healthy boundaries is about bringing order... where a balance is needed. No boundaries mean there's chaos, and too many boundaries reek of control. Boundaries show where the borders are, but they are never about punishment and retaliation.

We can only take responsibility for ourselves. Matthew 7:5 exhorts us to first take the log out of our own eyes, so that we can see clearly see the speck in someone else's eye. There is a strong warning about being a hypocrite- someone who pretends to be something they're not.

Taking responsibility for someone else is overstepping or violating a boundary. We must ask ourselves the question "who is carrying whom?" If you are working harder at fixing someone's problem than they are, you are out of bounds.

Boundary issues usually stem from family or origin or childhood dysfunction. Galatians 6, verses 7 and 8, speak of the principle of sowing and reaping. Good boundaries ensure we don't reap what someone else has sown. We must allow people to suffer the consequences of their own actions and choices. Unsanctified mercy gives people license to stay in their disfunction, and it enables toxic behaviour to continue to cause pain to those eating the bad fruit of the person's choices and behaviour. Good boundaries say "I do me, and you do you" – meaning that I take responsibility for my healing, my personal and spiritual growth and for my character formation.

It is especially important to note that we are not accountable to anyone who is not responsible for me.

REFLECTION

May I suggest that you, dear reader, consider whether there are people in your world that you are taking too much responsibility for? Is there a demand made on you for accountability by people who take no responsibility for you? Are there people whose problems you are working on for harder, and longer than they are?

We cannot change or redeem that which we do not acknowledge. Invite Jesus into the journey and ask Him to help you answer these questions.

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SETTING BOUNDARIES

Have you ever considered that your skin is a built-in boundary? You are entitled to choose who touches you, and how and when that touch is appropriate. I will illustrate this by sharing a personal story. It may sound funny now, as I retell it, but truth be told, it was a serious violation of my no.

There was an incident some years ago when I was deeply distressed, emotionally violated, and traumatized. My, now former, pastor and his wife were called to minister to me and she, lovely lady that she was, wanted to comfort me by hugging me. I know it sounds lovely, but I felt too unsafe that I did not want to be touched, something that I expressed explicitly.

She ignored my request not to be touched and insisted on hugging me anyway. We were living in a small apartment at the time, and I tried to flee the embrace. So, there we were, two adult women, running around a tight space, me screaming "don't touch me" and her chasing after me, screaming "you need a hug, you need a hug"! I was eventually cornered in the kitchen, and with no way to escape, I was thoroughly embraced and held until I stopped squirming. As I write this, the comical picture does not escape me, but that was not okay. Someone violating physical boundaries like that, even with the best intentions, is out of line.

Using our words is another way of establishing and enforcing boundaries. If we don't have the courage to say yes and no it would be wise to explore the reason why. The truth of God's Word is another way of establishing healthy boundaries. The Bible is full of wisdom, and scriptures direct our lives. As we've seen already, the Bible is God's blueprint for healthy individuals, communities and even nations.

Geographical distance is another way to set boundaries. Some families are so toxic and dysfunctional that the only way to become healthy is to establish boundaries by moving away altogether. Sometimes it's not possible to establish a geographical boundary, so a way to navigate that is to establish emotional distance.

One approach is something called the grey rock method. This is a communication strategy used when dealing with manipulative, toxic, or high-conflict people — particularly those with narcissistic traits. The idea is to make yourself as uninteresting and unreactive as a grey rock, so the other person loses interest in trying to provoke or engage you.

Let me explain how it works. Instead of setting explicit verbal boundaries (which often escalate conflict with manipulative people), you withdraw emotional fuel by becoming boring and unresponsive. You don't argue, defend yourself, or show emotion — you simply give flat, dull responses that offer nothing to feed off.

In practice it looks like giving short, neutral answers to questions, not responding emotionally to provocations, criticism or guilt-tripping, avoiding personal topics and over sharing, or sharing information that can be used against you later. You give yourself permission to quit debating, justifying, defending or explaining yourself. In these cases, it's recommended to use a flat tone when speaking to the person, and to avoid making eye contact.

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Time can be a great boundary, or more explicitly, time out, or time away from the boundary crosser. In extreme cases people will have to resort to going no contact for extended periods, or even on a permanent basis. Context and individual circumstances will dictate these extreme boundaries. God's heart for His people is always reconciliation, and we are to be people who minister reconciliation to one another, but there are special circumstances where this is not possible.

Another way to set a boundary is with emotional distance. From a Christian perspective, healthy emotional distance is really about guarding your heart while still loving others well. We can look to Proverbs 4:23 as a foundation, as it says to guard your heart above all else. This isn't about being closed off — it's about protecting what God has placed inside you so you can continue to give from a healthy place.

We need to remind ourselves that Jesus is your source, not people. When you draw your sense of worth and peace from God rather than others' approval, you naturally have more stability in relationships. Love doesn't mean merging. You're called to love your neighbour — but you can't pour from an empty cup. Rest, boundaries, and emotional space are acts of stewardship, not selfishness.

We can be compassionate people, without carrying all of their burdens ourselves. Jesus wept with people and felt deep compassion — but He also withdrew regularly to be alone with the Father. That rhythm of engagement and retreat kept Him grounded.

Therefore, we should cast the burden on Jesus and not absorb it. When someone's pain or negativity threatens to overwhelm you, the Christian response is to bring it to God rather than carry it yourself (1 Peter 5:7).

At the heart of it lies this truth - you are responsible *to* people, not *for* them. Loving someone well sometimes means staying steady and rooted rather than being pulled into their chaos — because a grounded, peaceful presence often helps them more than matching their anxiety does.

Allowing people to suffer the consequences of their choices and actions is a highly effective way to establish and hold boundaries. Consider this - close relationships need to be mutual and mutually satisfying. In a healthy relationship, one person cannot work harder than the other to sustain the relationship.

Where then do boundaries come from? Some are learned, for example as children we are supposed to be taught that our bodies are our own and that we have autonomy over it. Responsible, healthy parents will teach their children that they have permission to say no to any touch that feels unsafe or uncomfortable.

Some boundaries are modelled to us. An example of this is a parent who knocks before coming into an older child's room. As a grandparent I ask permission from my young grandsons before entering their rooms to join their play.

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Some boundaries look like survival skills because of pain. Healthy boundaries as a survival skill are the hard-won limits we develop after experiencing pain, teaching us what we will and won't tolerate in order to protect our wellbeing. They might look like saying no without guilt, limiting contact with people who consistently hurt us, refusing to take responsibility for others' emotions, or simply recognising when a situation is unsafe and choosing to leave. Unlike walls built from bitterness, these boundaries are acts of self-respect and self-preservation — practical wisdom that pain teaches us when we take time to reflect on what we truly need to feel safe and whole.

On the other hand, unhealthy boundaries are works of the flesh. They tend to be driven by fear, pride, self-protection, or control rather than genuine wisdom and love. They might look like completely shutting people out and building emotional walls so thick that no real intimacy or vulnerability is possible, using "boundaries" as an excuse to avoid accountability or never being challenged or corrected.

They can show up as manipulation — setting rules that control others' behaviour to serve our own comfort — or as selfishness disguised as self-care, where we consistently prioritise our own needs with no regard for others. Sometimes they appear as unforgiveness hardened into permanent rejection, cutting people off not out of genuine safety but out of pride or a desire to punish.

Rather than being rooted in love and discernment, these boundaries are driven by the ego's need to stay in control, remain comfortable, and avoid the vulnerability that true relationship requires. The key difference is the motive — healthy boundaries bring life and protection, while fleshly ones ultimately breed isolation, bitterness, and disconnection.

The next question would then be around the things that are within my boundaries to protect. Let's break it down into a few areas:

Feelings

Your feelings are valid and belong to you — no one has the right to tell you what you should or shouldn't feel. Protecting your feelings means allowing yourself to acknowledge and process them honestly, without suppressing them to keep others comfortable, while also not letting others manipulate or weaponise your emotions against you.

Attitudes

You are responsible for the attitudes you carry — and equally, you have the right to protect yourself from environments or people that consistently poison your attitude. Guarding your attitude means being intentional about what you allow to shape your outlook, choosing gratitude, hope, and truth over bitterness and negativity.

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Beliefs, Morals and Values

These are the foundation of who you are. No person, culture, or pressure should be able to erode what you know to be true and right. Protecting these means standing firm even when it's unpopular and not compromising your convictions to gain approval or avoid conflict.

Choices and Triggers

You own your choices — no one can force you to react in a way that violates your values. Knowing your triggers is powerful self-awareness; it allows you to pause before reacting and choose your response rather than being controlled by your wounds. Protecting this means taking responsibility for your responses rather than blaming others for "making" you act a certain way. You are fully responsible for your healing, and you are allowed to exercise your right not to respond to triggers.

Thoughts

Not every thought that enters your mind originates with you — some are planted by past trauma, the enemy, or toxic environments. Protecting your thought life means actively taking thoughts captive, testing them against truth, and refusing to meditate on lies about yourself or others. What you dwell on shapes who you become.

Wants and Desires

Your wants and desires matter and are worth acknowledging honestly before God. Protecting them doesn't mean chasing every desire unchecked but rather bringing them into the light — discerning which are God-given and which are flesh-driven — and not allowing others to consistently dismiss or invalidate what you long for.

Talents

Your talents are God-given and entrusted specifically to you. You have both the ownership and the responsibility of how they are used. Protecting them means not allowing others to exploit, minimise, or misuse your gifts, and being intentional about stewarding them in ways that align with your calling rather than simply pleasing people.

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God's Call on Your Life

This is perhaps the most sacred boundary of all. Your calling is between you and God, and it must be fiercely protected from the opinions, doubts, and agendas of others. People may misunderstand it, discourage it, or try to redirect it — but guarding your call means staying anchored to what God has spoken over your life, even in seasons of waiting, resistance, or opposition.

The thread running through all of these is stewardship — you are not just protecting yourself; you are protecting what God has placed within you and entrusted to you. That makes boundaries not just healthy, but *holy*.



Boundaries

HOW TO DISAPPOINT YOUR WORLD AND THRIVE

You need to be a good steward of yourself as a resource. God created each one of us for a purpose...anything that stops us from fulfilling that purpose is sin, and therefore out of bounds. Let's explore this statement a bit further.

The original Hebrew word for sin, *chata*, and the Greek word *hamartia* both carry the literal meaning of **'missing the mark'** — like an archer whose arrow falls short of or veers away from the target. The mark, or target, is God's perfect standard of righteousness, holiness, and love — the very nature and character of God Himself.

This definition reveals something important: sin is not simply about breaking a list of rules. It is about falling short of what we were originally created to be and do. God designed humanity to reflect His image, to live in perfect alignment with His will, His ways, and His love. Every time we think, speak, or act outside of that design — whether through rebellion, weakness, ignorance, or selfishness — we miss the mark.

What makes this definition so powerful is that it is both personal and positional. It acknowledges that we all fall short — not just the "obviously wicked," but every human being. As Romans 3:23 affirms, *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. No one, in their own strength, hits the mark perfectly.

The beauty of the Gospel is that Jesus never missed the mark — He perfectly fulfilled what we could not. And through faith in Him, His righteousness is credited to us, restoring us to right standing with God and giving us the Holy Spirit to help us aim true in our daily lives. Sin is missing the mark — but grace is God closing the distance we could never close ourselves, even to the point of healing and restoring us to a place where we are able to set and hold boundaries around ourselves and the calling on our lives.

In every sphere of life — family, friendship, ministry, and the workplace — we will encounter people who carry hidden agendas, and how we navigate them will determine the health of our relationships and the integrity of our calling. Hidden agendas breed suspicion, erode trust, and ultimately strip us of our ability to influence others for good. Jesus Himself was no stranger to this — throughout His ministry, people constantly tried to push, pull, and bend Him toward their own expectations and purposes. Yet He navigated every agenda with wisdom, clarity, and an unshakeable sense of divine assignment. As we examine four types of agenda contenders, we will see not only how to recognise and respond to them, but how to ultimately become agenda defenders — people so convinced of God's call on their lives that no outside agenda can derail or define us. Next, we will explore some hidden agendas that can keep us stuck.

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AGENDA CONTENDERS:

Hidden agendas will cause one person to perceive another person as devious. They will start to question motives, words, and actions. Soon trust is lost and without trust, you lose the ability to influence others.

Agenda menders

These are the people that see a problem and make you the solution. A Biblical example of this is found in John 6:15 where we see how a crowd of people wanted to make Jesus king by force, thereby solving their problems. Jesus sets the example for dealing with agenda menders by withdrawing.

Agenda blenders

These are those who communicate to us what they want us to do for them or be to them to satisfy their expectations. In John 7:1 – 4 we read how Jesus' brothers wanted Him to reveal Himself by doing miracles at the Feast of Tabernacles in Judea. His response to this is to tell them to go by themselves. When confronted with these people our solution is to tell them to do it themselves...know your timing!

Agenda benders

The people for whom a rule or boundary is okay for them, but not for you – they belong to the "do as I say, not as I do" crowd. Jesus faced ones like this. In John 7: 19 – 24 we read about a confrontation with the Pharisees who circumcised babies on a sabbath but didn't want Jesus to heal on the sabbath. We can follow Jesus' example and solve the problem by calling out the hypocrisy and/or partiality and search for what is right and fair.

Agenda defenders

This is what we are aiming for. John 7: 28, 29 is a portion of scripture where Jesus declares that He knows God and is sent from and by Him. We follow His lead by being fully convinced that God sets our path, even when it may not suit our initial expectations or others' agendas. This may mean that we suffer pain now, for gain later. It may also mean letting friends and family down or working against religious expectations.

The truth is that if we seek to please God, it's His pleasure we must seek. Although we don't deliberately set out to disappoint people, we will. The question we should ask ourselves is whether we are disappointing the right ones?

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SOME THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS AROUND DISAPPOINTMENT

When our boundaries aren't respected, disappointment naturally follows. Whether we've extended good faith to someone or clearly established the terms of a relationship, a violation of those boundaries leaves us feeling violated in return.

Navigating this well begins with honest self-reflection. Are your expectations realistic? Are your boundaries fair and enforceable — and can you manage the situation rather than looking to fix, cure, or escape it entirely? It's also worth examining the space between expectation and disappointment, because assumption often lives there, quietly setting us up for hurt.

From there, the work becomes relational. Express your needs clearly. Learn to disappoint the right people by offering the gift of "no" — and equally, develop the grace to receive someone else's "no" without taking it personally. Look for recurring patterns in your relationships and ask honestly what needs to change.

Ultimately, transformation requires us to sit with guilt and disappointment rather than avoid them. They are not dead ends — they are invitations to grow.

Boundaries

META-EMOTION

Meta-emotion is the structured layer of feeling we place on top of our emotions — in short, it's how we feel *about* feelings, whether our own or someone else's. For example, you might feel sad over losing a cherished possession, then feel guilty for that sadness because others have suffered greater losses. That guilt is the meta-emotion — a judgment placed over the original feeling.

A grounding truth to hold onto: emotions are data, not directions. They inform us, but they don't have to dictate us.

Disappointment is a useful emotion to examine through this lens. On the surface it seems straightforwardly negative, yet it's rarely that simple. What disappointment feels like varies enormously from person to person, and it seldom arrives alone — it often brings companions like sadness, anger, shame, or even relief. The experience shifts further depending on which side of it you're on. Feeling disappointed is one thing; believing you have disappointed someone you love is another weight altogether.

Perhaps the deepest layer is what happens when we feel we have disappointed God — for many, that carries a unique and heavy grief, touching something at the core of identity, worth, and belonging.

The invitation is to sit with these questions rather than rush past them. Disappointment doesn't have to be purely negative. Examined honestly, it can become one of the more revealing and redemptive emotions we experience.

Boundaries

Epilogue

You made it to the other side of this study. That alone is worth acknowledging.

The journey through boundaries is not a tidy one. It rarely unfolds in the neat, sequential way a Bible study might suggest. More often, it is circular — you revisit the same patterns, encounter the same people, and face the same choices, only now with new eyes and a different vocabulary for what you are experiencing. That is not failure. That is growth.

What we hope you carry with you from these pages is not a checklist or a set of rules, but a renewed sense of who you are in God's hands — and what He has entrusted to your care. You are a resource. You are a calling. You are a person made in the image of the God who separated the light from the dark and called both of them by name. You are worth protecting.

The boundaries you begin to establish may not be understood by everyone around you. You may disappoint people you love. You may encounter pushback, guilt, and the familiar pull of old habits. But remember what Jesus modelled throughout His earthly ministry: He loved deeply and without reservation, and He protected His purpose fiercely. The two were never in conflict for Him, and they need not be in conflict for you.

Be patient with yourself. Change is slow, and transformation is a process, not an event. Give yourself the same grace you are learning to extend to others — and give others the same space you are learning to claim for yourself.

Finally, do not walk this road alone. Share what you have learned. Keep the conversation going. Invite others into this work, because a community of women who understand and respect one another's boundaries — who can say *no* with love and *yes* with intention — is a powerful, beautiful, and rare thing.

You were created on purpose, for a purpose. Live accordingly.

Freely you have received — now freely be.