



Healthy Boundaries

For you have been called to live in freedom -- not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "love your neighbor as yourself. (Galatians 5)

Defining and holding to personal boundaries leads to many benefits in our daily lives: 1) they help us live respectfully and safely in relationships; 2) they help us know peace; and 3) they give us opportunity to develop the use of the gifts and talents God has entrusted to us. So, how do we follow God in a new healthy life of living within the freedom of boundaries and limits?

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2)

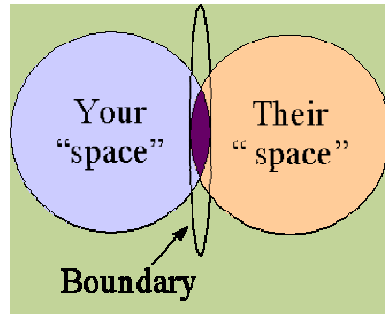
Two areas of setting limits or establishing healthy boundaries are: 1) *setting limits on others* and 2) *setting our internal limits*. Both are equally important for a healthy and happy life.

Limits on Others: We cannot actually set limits on others but what we can do is set limits on our own exposure to people who are behaving poorly. We can't change others or make them behave right. We need to let people be who they are and then separate ourselves from them when they misbehave. It's beneficial for all concerned when we separate ourselves from those who act in destructive ways.

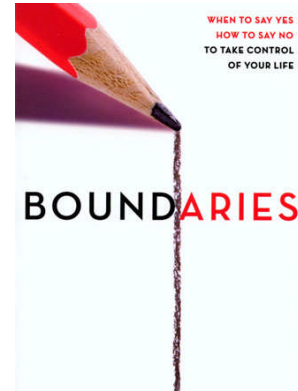
We are not being unloving. Separating ourselves protects love, because we are taking a stand against things that destroy love.

How do we set limits and separate ourselves in a healthy way? We make a choice to live appropriately before God and to do whatever it takes to honour God in any given situation. We choose to live in an atmosphere of safety, blessing, and encouragement.

At the outset, we name behaviours that are safe and unsafe so expectations are clear for everyone.



- ✿ We take responsibility for our part in creating a safe and respectful environment.
- ✿ When words become heated or harsh we can change the tone, change the direction of the conversation, or simply discontinue an angry accusatory exchange.
- ✿ We just stop and step away until emotions are safe and thoughts are clear.
- ✿ We take time out to get help and seek God's voice or the counsel of a prayerful person.



Internal Limits: As we come into healthy daily living through a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, we discover satisfying living in a surprising form – life within limits.

- ✿ Instead of gratifying our momentary desires with destructive and sinful activities we experience fulfillment through waiting for a healthy alternative.
- ✿ Instead of stumbling into shame and regret from hurtful angry outbursts we find peace through forgiveness and letting go.
- ✿ We choose to say yes to those behaviours that God says bring love and joy and peace. Any momentary limits to our thinking and behaviour open more

✿ We seek forgiveness for any part we have in the problem.

✿ We learn how to communicate and act with respect and love and to ask for the same in return.

✿ We refuse gossip and slander no matter how difficult the situation and instead entrust the person with whom we are having difficulty to God.

Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Luke 6:28

Some Areas Where I Can Set Healthy Internal Boundaries

Feelings – own my own feelings – feelings come from my heart. I can learn to recognize feelings without being controlled by them.

Attitudes – own the way I relate to others – underlying attitudes have impact -- do my words and actions match my inner attitude?

Beliefs and values – own my beliefs and be responsible for what I love and assign importance to – my behaviour identifies my values and beliefs

Choices and Behaviour – Accept responsibility for my choices and be willing to face the consequences of my behaviour. Give the same respect to others, neither controlling nor rescuing.

Talents – Use skills and talents joyfully and responsibly. Don't let things like fear of failure, or opinions of others keep me from acting. Take initiative to learn new things -- including lessons from failures.

doors to goodness than what they seem to close to temporary pleasure.

✿ We can learn to have spaces inside ourselves where we can have a feeling, an impulse, or a desire, without acting it out.

✿ We can say no to destructive desires and also to good desires but which are just not wise to pursue at a given time.

We can experience self-control without repression. We can say no to ourselves in a way that is actually saying yes to satisfying living. This internal structure is a very important component of boundaries and building a healthy identity as a son or daughter of God.

Live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict. But when you are directed by the Holy Spirit you are free.
(Galatians 5:16-18 NLT)

Some Areas Where I Can Set Healthy External Boundaries

Truth: Know the truth about yourself and face it. Know the truth about God and you will be able to define yourself in relation to His truth. Know God's laws and do your best to live within them. Satan will try to twist God's truth ("Did God say") so you need to be very familiar with His truth.

Words: The most basic is "no". Your words let others know where you stand. If you cannot say "no" to external pressure and internal pressures you have let go of self-control. Your words let people know where they stand with you.

Physical distance: Sometimes it is wise to remove yourself from danger and establish a safe place. No one should remain in a household where there is physical abuse taking place. It may be necessary to physically remove yourself from an abusive relationship.

Time: Taking time out from a relationship can improve the relationship. Those who return home after some time away and some helpful input, often find their former relationship has improved

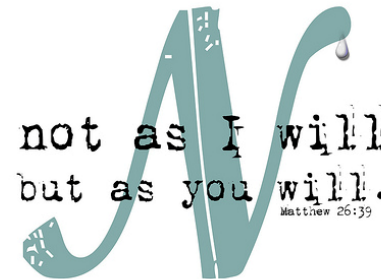
Emotional distance: A temporary boundary to give yourself space and to allow another time to demonstrate change. By withdrawing emotionally for a short period in an abusive relationship the other person is given an opportunity to be responsible for their actions and to demonstrate true repentance.

Skin: Our skin was designed to keep the good in and the bad out. Many victims of sexual and physical abuse have not learned their skin is their boundary.

Jesus walked on this earth with people who often didn't agree with him, weren't loyal to Him, and were just trying to figure out what to do with Him. As we begin to get to know God and walk with Him, we experience some of these same conflicts between our thinking and behaving and God's way of thinking and behaving. We may wonder about what the Bible teaches and why God limits our behaviour in certain ways? However, the more we choose to live within healthy boundaries and limits we will come to know by experience that God actually knows how life works.

To live truly free we must make it our priority and our habit to make responsible choices and maintain new daily habits that flow from surrendering our old way to God's new way. Our lives must echo the choices for safe boundaries and

limits that Jesus demonstrated the night before He gave His life for us. " **He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."** (Matthew 26:39)



Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which of these two are easier or harder for me, setting limits with others or dealing with my own desires?
2. Who do I have in my life to help me sort priorities on an ongoing basis?
3. Do I choose to accept God's standards for limit-setting in each of the areas listed?

