

WHY SETTING BOUNDARIES CAN SET US FREE

ser3974 Friends in Conflict, Pt4
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Several months ago, before Covid-19, I had to visit the Apple store in the mall to get one of my many devices repaired. All I wanted to do was to walk in, go up to the front counter and state my need. But that's not how it works in the Apple store.

As you may have noticed, Apple stores are laid out in a very "minimalistic" manner with no contrasting colors and nothing sectioned off. It's called an **open-air design**.

When you walk in to the store, you are immediately greeted by some Apple geek with an iPad who assigns you a time when they will see you. Then they ask that you "go stand somewhere over there."

And so, after I stood for a while, I looked around and noticed a couple other guys wearing the same "unsure face" because we didn't know if we were doing it right. Of course, we weren't letting anyone know how uncomfortable we were, so we started acting like we were cool, too. We were trying to be like everyone else in this modern, very inclusive, free and open world. But if I am going to be honest, it was none of these things.

Everything that represents boundaries is removed in order to give the appearance of inclusion and freedom. But that's all it

is. Appearance. Because with no structured lines of separation and no clear borders, disorder occurs. And because of this, there then needs to be someone in place who will police every step. Those responsible for this policing would be the trove of iPad carrying young adults walking around, ready to pounce on any new person walking in.

They became the border. They became the boundary. And instead of a wall, there is a hand saying “yes” or “no,” “stand there,” “wait here,” “move forward” and so on. These now are borders made of words.

What I realized was that I wanted borders, I wanted walls, I wanted a marked off place designated **for my needs**. You see, rules, boundaries, laws and principles are more often than not the very thing that free us the most, and certainly the thing that keeps life from becoming chaotic. And those who experiment with a world without boundaries will see that eventually someone will come along to fill those roles instead.

But there will be other walls, other boundaries to deal with. Only this time it will be at the discretion of a person who looks at you as a number, a place in line. This is not the promise and potential that God set aside for us to walk in.

So, I began thinking.... Thinking about how this scenario is not just in stores or borders of a nation or what have you. It's also what we face in our interpersonal personal relationships as well.

Our relationships require boundaries in order to work.

It's almost impossible to have a healthy relationship with someone with non-existent boundaries. So let's see what the word of God can teach us as we dive into this topic with today's sermon.

Why Setting Boundaries Can Set Us Free

There is a freedom we can have from boundaries. Personal boundaries are what clarify who "you" are. They say, "These are my weaknesses, these are my needs, here are my strengths and so let's move forward within that framework."

Without boundaries, we become unintentionally molded in the image of others. We become what they want, or need, or desire because their boundaries will fill in the void. Do you know what happens? The true us is gone. And that often leaves us very frustrated.

I must admit this. Christians are notorious for throwing away any boundaries when it comes to relationships. We really are. After all, Christians are supposed to care for others and help out when they can, and, of course that's true.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. (Romans 12: 15-16a)

All of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous. (1 Peter 3:8)

Caring for others is a beautiful Christian virtue. The problem, though, for Christians, is that if the relationship is not balanced, it can become unhealthy.

I remember back when I first ran our young adults' group, "The Rising." There was a young male who was always getting himself in trouble. I was only leading the group for about a month when I found myself picking this young man up from jail. He had nowhere to go, so I let him stay at my studio and would pick up his laundry and give him money until finally I realized this was not only not helping him, but it was killing me.

So, I decided that I would place boundaries on what I would and would not allow myself to do. Do you know what happened next? He moved on to someone else and forced his self-made chaos onto that person.

I quickly learned that Christians without boundaries fall into a useless trap. And we do it over and over, because we are known to be compassionate and giving and devoted to others. And there is a name for this type of personality. It's called **Empaths.**

Empaths

Empaths are "emotional sponges" who can absorb feelings from other people very easily. They tend to believe that they can fix a person with their issues, even when those issues are self-inflicted. Empaths can connect deeply with someone else, but they also take on the other's problems as their own, **blurring the boundaries of where they end and where the other begins. They empathize.**

And, unfortunately, what empaths often do is attract someone

with an opposite personality... the Narcissist.

The Narcissist

Narcissism is characterized by a grandiose sense of self-importance, a lack of empathy for others and, a thriving on drama and chaos, often manipulating those they find who are weaker than themselves. To the narcissist, people who live without boundaries (the empaths) are a perfect prey to feed their personality. This is because empaths have a lot of compassion and understanding and tend to forgive everything the narcissist does.

Empathetic people have the tendency to understand that we're all human, we all have defects, and they're willing to be patient with someone else's personal growth. They are long suffering! Just like God is. **And Christians, in particular, fall into those traps.**

If someone asks you for your shirt, you give your cloak, too. If someone slaps you on one cheek, then you should offer them the other.

And so, "I'll do what you want me to do. And I must, because I am a Christian."

The relationships between Empaths and Narcissists are well studied in the world of psychology. What is interesting is that Narcissism is on a spectrum. There is Grandiose Narcissistic Personality Disorder all the way down to the average person. **In other words, it is believed that everyone has Narcissistic traits which are learned from childhood.**

EXAMPLE: A child wants what they want, when they want it, they don't think of your feelings when it comes to the matter, and they will do what it takes to get it because the world revolves around them.

The Bible, though, has its own name for this type of personality. It is called SIN. It is simply that... SIN.

This is what man is. He is an inherent narcissist at heart. Maybe not to the point of a personality disorder, but the tendency is there in **all of us**.

But what does Jesus do? He changes the heart. He gets in there and softens it by opening our eyes to see others before ourselves. And the narcissist.... becomes empathetic. (Which makes us a target for other narcissists.)

I am here to tell you we are not called to live this way. We can be both empathetic and have limits to what we will or will not do or say. I know this because of Jesus. Jesus was empathetic but had boundaries with people. For instance, He would regularly take time away from people, even when they were looking for him, to go and be alone with the Father. If he felt the need to live up to everyone's expectations of him, he would never have had time to be alone with God.

*Luke 5:15 - Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 **But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.***

Jesus wouldn't let Peter try to control His destiny.

22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Of all the people who followed Jesus here on earth, He only allowed himself to have 12 friends and out of those 12 only 3 were His best friends. Peter, James and his beloved disciple, John.

Jesus put boundaries on who He was going to hang out with and pour into.

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend that sticks closer than a Brother. (Prov 18:24)

Jesus allowed Himself to stay in contact with the Pharisees but kept them at arm's length.

Usually, boundaries happen naturally in a friendship, but sometimes they need a gentle assertion.

Let me go through some truths that I have learned over the years when it comes to boundaries in friendships. I must say, though, you will need to make these personal choices and most importantly stick with them even if it goes against your nature. After a short period of time it will become second nature.

Boundary #1: Time

If a friend unloads too much information with detail, or is doing it at a moment where your time is pressed, it's ok to interrupt them and ask, "Well, look. What can I do for you now?" Or state, "I only have a few moments," and stick with that. Checking in after is great.

The same is true with friends or acquaintances who only talk or interrupt you. It's ok to have a boundary where you state, "Hold on for a moment; let me get my point across." You can't have friendship without communication. And you can't have communication without communing.

Boundary #2: A Constant Ear

Personal boundaries may be practiced when someone tries to reach you. Answering multiple emails a day or getting phone calls in late evening may really bother you. What we too often do is send out emotional hints. Example: We ignore the phone call and pretend that, "oops, it was on silent. Sorry."

This is not Christian. If you can't be honest with your personal boundaries, then what's the point? We need to open our mouths in a friendly way and be truthful.

Boundary #3: Choosing Friends

Again, we cannot be friends with everyone and there are times when we have to have boundaries on friendships because of circumstances.

For instance, my wife and I are best friends. This means I will not have another female best friend besides her. In other words, I cannot allow myself to get emotional support or to share my heart with another woman. That's my wife's role. And if my wife is not fulfilling that role then we have to work on that part of our relationship. But I have a personal boundary: I only have one deep female relationship and that's with my wife.

LOOK OUT FOR THESE RED FLAGS!!

Are we spending time alone together?

Are our meetings (especially locations) increasingly private?

Are we complaining about our marriages (or love life) to each other?

Are we texting each other privately?

Do I find myself thinking about them, or fantasizing about a life with them?

Do I find myself excusing intimacy that would be otherwise inappropriate?

Christian boundaries are like a fence around me and my wife, to protect us.

I can let people in with me and my wife. What I can't do is walk out of that boundary and leave her there by herself.

Imagine if we both walked out of the boundary. There would be an empty boundary, not protecting us anymore

Many Christians wonder if we can have close friendships with non-believers. Absolutely. You must set the boundary of who you are in that relationship. I have a deep friendship with Pastor Bruce, who is, as far as I can see, a Christian. I also have a deep friendship with one of my business partners, Bill, who is not a Christian.

I am the same with both of them, because my boundaries are the same. I talk about Jesus to both. I don't use profanity in front of either of them. I don't talk about inappropriate things with them either, because I set boundaries in my life that I carry with me. I will not compromise them just because someone is not a Christ-follower.

Here at GCCC we have a three-point mission. We share Christ, connect people and serve others. We have been facing tough times lately that have limited our connection time. Connecting in friendships is very important in God's kingdom. That's why we have GCG and we serve together and have our small groups. It's so we never forsake the gathering together of the brethren.

But we must always do so with reasonable boundaries in place in order to protect those relationships. Even in deep relationships like marriage, our boundaries should be defined early on so we can be set free of the trap of compromising who we are.