

Healthy Boundaries – Dan Hitz

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“Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership.”

Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No to Take Control of Your Life. Henry Cloud and John Townsend. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI. 1992. p 33.



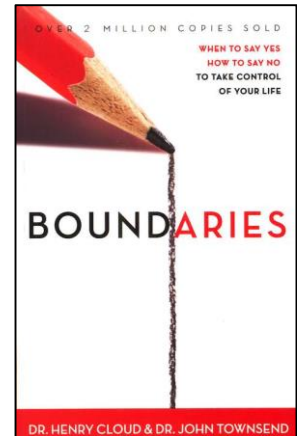
Those of us who grew up in a dysfunctional family don't instinctively know how to have healthy boundaries. Saying no to our abusers brought harsh consequences. We learned to pretend that everything was ok and just give in to the demands of others. Some of us were so alone and empty that we abandoned our boundaries and let others into our hearts who stole what was precious to us. We didn't magically learn how to have healthy boundaries when we left our dysfunctional families. Many of us took our broken boundaries with us into our new social circle and ended up repeating many of the same behaviors that created our problems in the first place. Understanding what healthy boundaries are and implementing them into our lives and relationships, will help us to have more peace. Healthy boundaries improve our relationships with God and others.

Boundaries protect us from unsafe people, establish who we are, and show how we are different from others. They define what I will choose and what I will not choose. They identify what I will accept and what I will not accept. Boundaries also show who I am, and who I am not. They can be physical, emotional, spiritual, sexual, and relational. Physical boundaries can be as large as international borders, or as personal as fences and locked doors. Christians uphold spiritual boundaries when they choose not to participate in new age activities or watch certain types of movies. Emotional boundaries protect us from the abusive behavior of others, or guard our hearts from those who try to manipulate us.

It takes a lot of practice to learn to live with healthy boundaries and find the proper balance. Some people who have been hurt by others may have boundaries that are way too strong and not let anyone into their lives. The problem with this is that healthy people will respect those broken boundaries and stay away, while unhealthy people will push right through them and make matters worse. This just seems to add more bricks to the wall as the hurt person fails to realize that they are the ones pushing healthy people away. Getting hurt again "confirms" their need for the massive walls. Other people have boundaries that are not strong enough. Have you ever stood in line at the supermarket by someone with little or no emotional boundaries and heard their entire heart wrenching life story before you were finished paying for your groceries? They are so desperate for emotional connection that they share way too much of their heart with people that have no emotional investment in their lives. Emotionally healthy people withdraw as they feel that their own relationship boundaries have been intruded upon. This serves as a "confirmation" to those with porous

boundaries that they need to share even more of their hearts in a broken attempt to latch onto relationships. Learning to have the proper balance in our boundaries will help us build healthier relationships.

How do we begin the process of evaluating our present boundaries and making adjustments? Reading the classic book, *Boundaries* by Cloud and Townsend, is a great place to start. We should also start by taking some time to pray and ask the Lord to show us how He sees our boundaries. Where are they too strong or too weak? Do they adequately reflect who we are in Christ? Do our boundaries help us to deflect the fiery darts of the enemy that come at us from those we love? Do they allow us to carry our own responsibilities while requiring others in our lives to carry theirs? If we try to fix others by assuming the consequences for their actions we actually encourage their negative behavior, take away their motivation to change, and end up carrying a burden that is not ours to carry. Simply put, learning to have good boundaries begins by asking some of the following questions: "What is the right thing to do in this situation as a Christian man or woman?" "Is this the type of behavior that I should accept from my spouse, child, coworker, friend, etc.?" "Is this activity consistent with my Christian faith?"



A word of wisdom as you begin to implement healthy boundaries. The people in your life who are used to taking advantage of you will not like it. They are used to the way things used to be and will not like the fact that they cannot get away with doing what they have done in the past. Be prepared for them to push against your boundaries to try to get you to give in and go back to the way things used to be. It will be important for you to find some Christians who are safe and can give you the emotional support that you need for the process. A good place to find trustworthy people may be the pastoral care department of your church, a local Celebrate Recovery, or a Christian therapist. They can help you stand strong when you feel like giving up. When you uphold your new boundaries, you are indirectly asking people to decide if they will respect you and your boundaries. Some will choose to walk away from you and find someone else that they can take advantage of. Others may realize that they have been wrong and begin to change. You cannot force them to make the right decision. Implementing healthy boundaries also means that you



will allow others in your life to decide for themselves how they will respond to your boundaries. Safe people will respond in the right way. Unsafe people will not.

There will be some speed bumps in your journey towards healthier boundaries, but don't give up. In time you will also begin to notice that you will have more peace and healthier relationships. As you seek the Lord for a deeper understanding of who you are in Him, you can design your boundaries according to His personal design for you. You can begin to make changes in your life so that you can breathe easier and become more fulfilled. Living within God's boundaries will do a deep work that will bless you in this life, and for all of eternity.