

Biblical Evolution

OF



CHANGE

Resources

The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant by Margaret Mahler
Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford Press)
Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (Chicago Press)
Love Must Be Tough by James Dobson
Secrets of Your Family Tree, by Dave Carder

The Human Psyche Unmasked

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Introduction

When some people read the Bible, they see a book of rules, do's and don'ts. When others read it, they see the philosophy of life and principles for the wise. Still others see mythology, stories about the nature of human existence the human dilemma.

Certainly, the Bible contains rules, principles, and explains what it is like to exist on this earth. We have made a comprehensive study of some of them. The rules and principles in the Bible are a necessity. To the believer however the Bible should be more than rules and principles it should be a living book about relationships. Relationships; God to people, people to God, and people to each other. It is about a God who created this world, placed people in it; related to people, lost that relationship, and continues to heal that relationship. It is about God as creator and His creation. It is about God as ruler who ultimately controls this world and will govern it accordingly. And it is about God as redeemer who finds, saves, and heals His loved ones who are lost and in bondage.

When a lawyer asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:37-40). All Scripture communicates a message of love. "Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself."

But how do we do that? Well, that's why there are so many other passages in the Bible! Loving God and our neighbor can be a challenge. One of the main reasons it's such a challenge is because of the inability to deal with some of the trauma that's taken place in our lives.

I am so pleased that many of you formalized your goals with "Blood Covenants." I sense true anticipation of an exciting future and I would like to share with you some of what God has laid on my heart concerning that future. It is my prayer that this message will encourage and help sustain your decision to reach for the stars.

God realizes that the acquisition of many of your goals will require **change. Change in both your behavior and lifestyle. Change in how you view your present circumstances and value systems. Change from some of the traditions held sacred by family and friends.**

Change is challenging. It may comfort you to know that if you are feeling a little intimidate, you are most likely on the right track. The desire to change and grow is not a natural experience. The fact that you have dared to move forward with God's plan for your life is a testament to your genuine desire to please Him.

Change means exercising faith to step from the safety of the known into the uncertainty of the unknown. The Bible is filled with stories about people called by God out of the known into the unknown. He promised those who would dare to step out that He would reward their effort. Abraham was such an example - when called to go to a place where he would receive his inheritance, Abraham obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Heb. 11:8). Although most

of our goals do not include relocating the principle is the same.

Remember, Jesus is our model. With this new series we will thoroughly examine the concept of change and need for change in our lives.

Broken Places

As we examine the need for change in our life we will find there are a number of broken places that will need to be repaired. We experienced many of our broken places during childhood.

As a child you are influenced primarily by your family of origin. This family consists of your parents, of course, whether they are living or dead and whether they were present or absent in your life when you were growing up. Others in your family of origin - such as grandparents or siblings - are also important. They taught you how to respond to life, and these lessons contribute to your current level of thinking.

You may have grown up, for example, with a parent who was sometimes loving and nurturing, but other times was unduly harsh or cruel. Not knowing what to expect, you tried harder and harder to please. Maybe you felt loved by your parents only when you made good grades or excelled in sports. Or perhaps when you were growing up, you were made to feel selfish if you didn't respond to every favor asked, and the guilt followed you into adulthood. **No** may be a hard word for you to say even now.

Psychologists have discovered that traumatic events in the first ten years of childhood have a profound impact on how they handle life. The divorce or death of a parent, any form of abuse, exposure to violence, or extreme poverty can leave lasting scars. Even common experiences such as moving away from a childhood home or being teased in school can affect us. As we

grow older, events continue to shape our lives. Everything you have experienced has contributed in some way to who you are today - including the results of your own choices.

But the impact of people in your life is not limited to your earliest influences. Teachers and classmates and coaches, boyfriends and girlfriends, bosses, colleagues and neighbors - any of these may have made a major positive or negative contribution to your life. If you are married or have been married, your spouse is certainly a major influence. So are your children or anyone who shares your home.

As you meditate on this message, consider how interactions with people who matter may be influencing your current level of thinking. Do admonitions from a feared coach still echo in your head? Does chronic conflict with a wayward child or a passive-aggressive boss drag you down? Are you involved in a toxic friendship that saps your confidence and energy? If so, resolving these relationship problems may give you a surprising energy boost. But try to keep your focus on understanding, not blaming.

Though other people leave footprints on our lives, they don't have the ultimate power to direct our steps. No matter who has influenced your past, with God's help you have the ability to reshape your future through your own choices and through people and influences you choose to have in your life now.

If you did not grow up in a home where you were loved and nurtured in positive ways, you might need to look outside your family for sources of support and

guidance. Though starts your movement toward a new supportive group; a new spiritual family; God's family. This new supportive group is based on mutual goals, interest and spirituality. (II Corinthians 12:1-4)

Numerous New Testament passages teach that if our original family is not in line with the Word, we need to forsake our allegiance to them and become adopted by God (Matt. 23:9). God commands us to look to Him as our Father and to have no parental intermediaries. Adults who are still holding an allegiance to ungodly earthly parents have not realized their new adoptive status.

When we become part of God's family, obeying His ways will sometimes cause conflict in our original families and sometimes separate us (Matt. 10:35-37). Jesus says that our spiritual ties are the closest and most important (Matt. 12:46-50). Our true family is the family of God.

Many times we are not obeying the Word of God because we have not spiritually left home. We feel we still need to please our parents and their traditional unscriptural ways of doing things rather than obey our new Father (Matt. 15:1-6).

In God's family, which is to be our strongest tie, things are done a certain way. We are to tell the truth, set limits, take and require responsibility, confront each other, forgive each other, and so on. Strong standards and values make this family run. And God will not allow it any other way in His family.

This in no way means that we are to totally cut other ties. We are to have friends outside of God's family and

strong ties with our family of origin. However, if we are to keep outside relationships, we need to ask two questions. Do these ties keep us from doing the right thing in any situation? And have we really become an adult in relation to our family of origin?

God has designed us with very specific needs from the family we grew up in. When we have **unmet** needs, we need to take inventory of the broken places inside and begin to have those needs met in the Body of Christ so that we will be strong enough to live as victorious adults.

These **unmet** developmental needs are responsible for much of our resistance to even setting goals. God has designed us to grow up in Godly families where parents do the things He has commanded. They nurture us, they have good standards, they forgive and help us resolve the difference between good and bad, and they empower us to become responsible adults. But many people have not had this experience. They are psychological orphans who need to be adopted and cared for by the Body of Christ; to differing extents, this is true of all of us.

The basic rule in biblical recovery is that the life before God is not worth holding on to; we must lose it, grieve it, and let go so that He can give us good things. We tend to hold on to the hope that "someday our broken places will just disappear;" that our **unmet** needs will be met in our family of origin.

The Bible is full of examples of God asking people to "leave behind" the people, lives, places and things that were not good for them. He asked the Israelites to leave

Egypt to have a better life, but many of them kept looking back, holding on to what they thought was better. When Lot and his wife left Sodom, the warning was to not look back, yet she did, and turned into a pillar of salt.

These **unmet** needs must be mourned and let go so that our hearts can be opened to the new things that God wants for us.

Many times to make changes means to be able to say "no" to a controlling parent, to a perfectionist husband, to an inattentive child, or to a demanding boss. Standing up to a controlling parent, for example, means you'll have to get in touch with the sadness of what you do not have with them, instead of working hard to get it. **This working hard keeps you from moving forward, it keeps you stuck.** But accepting the fact of who they are and letting go of the wish for them to be different is the essence of grief. Grief has a cycle; denial, anger, sadness, madness and finally acceptance.

We play the "if onlys," instead of developing emotional boundaries with love ones. We say to ourselves, unconsciously, "if only I would try to meet, instead of confronting my husbands perfectionist demands, he will love me." Or, "if only I would give into her wishes and not make her angry, she will love me." **Giving up to get love only postpones the inevitable.**

Whether you are manipulated, or abused the problem is not that you are with a bad person and your misery is their fault. The problem is that you have an **unmet** need. Don't blame someone else. You are the one with the problem.

Before we continue lets define “Broken Places or Trauma.” **A trauma is an intensely painful emotional experience, rather than a character pattern or flaw.** Emotional, physical, and sexual abuses are traumatic. Accidents and debilitating illnesses are traumatic. Severe losses such as the death of a parent, divorce, or extreme financial hardship are also traumatic.

A good way to look at the difference between character-relating patterns, such as withdrawal or hostility, and trauma, is to look at how a tree in a forest can be hurt. It can be fed inappropriately, through bad ingredients in the soil or it can be given too much or too little sun or water. That's an illustration of character - pattern problems. Trauma is like lightning hitting the tree.

A trauma can affect emotional development because it shakes up two necessary foundations to healthy growth:

The world is reasonably safe.

They have control over their lives.

Children who undergo trauma feel these foundations shaken up. They become unsure that they are safe and protected in the world, and they become frightened that they have no say - so in any danger that approaches them.

The heart of God seems to beat especially close to the victim of trauma: "He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted" (Isa. 61:1). God desires the wounds of the traumatic individual to be bound up by loving people.

Victims of trauma in the family are almost always recipients of character or sin related patterns. Withdrawal and Hostility are just two character patterns that may show up in a trauma victim. The ability to set limits are challenging for these individuals.

Examples of Boundaries

Boundaries are anything that helps to differentiate you from someone else, or shows where you begin and end. Here are some examples of boundaries.

Skin

The most basic boundary that defines you is your physical skin. People often use this boundary as a metaphor for saying that their personal boundaries have been violated: "He really gets under my skin." Your physical self is the first way that you learn that you are separate from others. As an infant, you slowly learn that you are different from the mother or father who holds you.

The skin boundary keeps the good in and the bad out. It protects your blood and bones, holding them on the inside and all together. It also keeps germs outside, protecting you from infection. At the same time skin has openings that let the "good" in, like food, and the "bad" out, like waste products.

Victims of physical and sexual abuse often have a poor sense of boundaries. Early in life they were taught that their property did not really begin at their skin. Others could invade their property and do whatever they wanted. As a result, they have difficulty establishing boundaries later in life.

Words

In the physical world a fence or some other kind of

structure usually delineates a boundary. In the spiritual world, fences are invisible. Nevertheless, you can create good protective fences with your words.

The most basic boundary-setting word is **no**. It lets others know that you exist apart from them and that you are in control of you. Being clear about your 'no' and your 'yes' is a theme that runs throughout the Bible (Matt. 5:37; James 5:12).

No is a confrontational word. The Bible says that we are to confront people we love, saying, "No, that behavior is not okay. I will not participate in that." The word **no** is also important in setting limits on abuse. Many passages of Scripture urge us to say **no** to others' sinful treatment of us (Matt. 18:15-20).

The Bible also warns us against giving to others "reluctantly or under compulsion" (II Cor. 9:7). People with poor boundaries struggle with saying **no** to the control, pressure, demands, and sometimes the real needs of others. **They feel that if they say no to someone, they will endanger their relationship with that person, so they passively comply but inwardly resent.** Sometimes a person is pressuring you to do something; other times the pressure comes from your own sense of what you "should" do. If you cannot say **no** to this external or internal pressure, you have lost control of your property and are not enjoying the fruit of "self-control."

Your words also define your property for others as you communicate your feelings, intentions, or dislikes. It is difficult for people to know where you stand when you do not use words to define your property. God does this when he says, "I like this and I hate that." Or, "I will do

this, and I will not do that." Your words let people know where you stand and thus gives them a sense of the "edges" that help identify you. "I don't like it when you yell at me!" gives people a clear message about how you conduct relationships and lets them know the "rules" of your yard.

Truth

Knowing the truth about God and his property puts limits on you and shows you His boundaries. Realizing the truth of His unchangeable reality helps you to define yourself in relation to Him. When He says that you will reap what you sow (Gal. 6:7), for example, you either define yourself in relation to that reality, or continue to get injured if you try to go against it. To be in touch with God's truth is to be in touch with reality, and to live in accord with that reality makes for a better life (Ps. 119:2, 45).

Satan is the great distorter of reality. Recall in the garden when he tempted Eve to question God's words and His truth. The consequences were disastrous.

There is always safety in the truth, whether it be knowing God's truth or knowing the truth about yourself. Many people live scattered and tumultuous lives trying to live outside of their own boundaries, not accepting and expressing the truth of who they are. Honesty about who you are gives you the biblical value of integrity and oneness with the Father.

Geographical Distance

Proverbs 22:3 says that "the prudent man sees the evil

and hides himself." Sometimes physically removing yourself from a situation will help maintain boundaries. You can do this to replenish yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually after you have given to your limit and exhaustion sets in. Jesus often slipped away to be replenished. You can also remove yourself to get away from danger and put limits on evil. The Bible urges us to separate from those who continue to hurt us and to create a safe place for ourselves. Removing yourself from the situation will also cause the one who is left behind to experience a loss of fellowship that may lead to behavioral change (Matt. 18:17, 18; I Cor. 5:11-13).

When a relationship is abusive, many times the only way to finally show the other person that your boundaries are real is to create space until they are ready to deal with the issue. The Bible supports the idea of limiting togetherness for the sake of "binding evil."

Time

Taking time off from a person, or a project, can be a way of regaining ownership over some out-of-control aspect of your life where limits need to be set.

Adult children who have never spiritually and emotionally separated from their parents often need time away. They have spent their whole lives 'embracing and keeping' (Eccl. 3:5-6) and have been afraid to refrain from embracing and to throw away some of their outgrown ways of relating. They need to spend some time building boundaries against the old ways and creating new ways of relating that for a while may feel alienating to their parents. This time apart usually improves their relationship with their parents.

Emotional Distance

Emotional distance is a temporary boundary to give your heart the space it needs to be safe; it is never a permanent way of living. People who have been in abusive relationships need to find a safe place to begin to "heal" emotionally. Sometimes in abusive marriages the abused spouse needs to keep emotional distance until the abusive partner begins to face his or her problems and become trustworthy again.

You should not continue to set yourself up for hurt and disappointment. If you have been in an abusive relationship, you should wait until it is safe and until real patterns of change have been demonstrated before you go back. Many people are too quick to trust someone in the name of forgiveness and not make sure that the other is producing "fruit in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8). To continue to open yourself up emotionally to an abusive or addicted person without seeing true change is foolish. **Forgive, but guard your heart until you see 'sustained' change.**

You need to depend on others to help you set and keep your boundaries. People subject to another person's addictions, control, or abuse are finding that after years and years of "giving-in too much," they can find the ability to create boundaries only through a support group. Their support system is giving them the strength to say **no** to abuse and control for the first time in their lives.

Other People

There are two reasons why you need others to help with

setting limits. The first is that your most basic need in life is relationships. People suffer much to have relationships, and many put up with abuse because they fear their partners will leave them and they will be alone if they stand up to them. Fear of being alone keeps many in hurtful patterns for years. They are afraid that if they set boundaries they will not have any love in their life.

When they open themselves up to support from God and others, however, they find that the abusive person is not the only source of love in the world and that they can find the strength through their support system to set the limits they need to set. They are no longer alone. The Body of Christ is there to give strength to ward off the blows against them.

The other reason we need others is because we need new input and teaching. Many people have been taught by their church or their family that setting limits are unbiblical, mean, or selfish. These people need good biblical support systems to help them stand against the guilt that comes from the old "tapes" inside that tell them lies to keep them in bondage. It's the contaminated reservoir at work. They need support from others to stand against the old messages and the guilt involved in change. My point is that boundaries are not built in a vacuum; creating limits always involves a support network.

Consequences

Trespassing on other people's property carries consequences. "No Trespassing" signs usually carry a threat of prosecution if someone steps over the boundaries. The Bible teaches this principle over and over, saying

that if we walk one way, this will happen, and if we walk another way, something else will happen.

Just as the Bible sets consequences for certain behaviors, we need to back up our boundaries with consequences. How many marriages could have been saved if one spouse had followed through with the threat of "if you don't stop drinking" (or "coming home at midnight," or "hitting me," or "yelling at the kids"), I will leave until you get it together!" Or how many young adults' lives would have been turned around if their parents had followed through with their threat of "no more money if you quit another job without having further employment" or "no bed if you continue to smoke marijuana in my house."

Paul is not kidding in II Thessalonians 3:10 when he says that if anyone will not work, don't let him or her eat. God does not enable irresponsible behavior. Hunger is a consequence of laziness (Prov. 16:26).

Consequences give some good "barbs" to fences. They let people know the seriousness of the trespass and the seriousness of our respect for ourselves. This teaches them that our commitment to living according to helpful values is something we hold dear and will fight to protect and guard.

Why Set Limits and Boundaries?

The story of the Good Samaritan is a model of correct behavior in many dimensions. It is a good illustration of boundaries—when they should be both observed and violated. Imagine for a moment how the story might read if the Samaritan were a boundaryless person.

You know the story. A man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was mugged. The robbers stripped him and beat him, leaving him half dead. A priest and Levite passed by on the other side of the road, ignoring the hurt man, but a Samaritan took pity on him, bandaged his wounds, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day the Samaritan gave the innkeeper some money and said, "Look after him. When I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have."

Let's depart from the familiar story here. Suppose the injured man wakes up at this point in the story and says:

"What? You're leaving?" "I can't believe you're leaving now."

"Yes, I am. I have some business in Jericho I have to attend to," the Samaritan replies.

"Don't you think you're being selfish? I'm in pretty bad shape here. I'm going to need someone to talk to. How is Jesus going to use you as an example? You're not even acting like a Christian, abandoning me like this in my time of need! Whatever happened to 'Deny yourself?'"

"Why, I guess you're right," the Samaritan says. "That would be uncaring of me to leave you here alone. I should do more. I will postpone my trip for a few days." So he stays with the man for three days, talking to him and making sure that he is happy and content. On the afternoon of the third day, there's a knock at the door and a messenger comes in. He hands the Samaritan a message from his business contacts in Jericho: "Waited as long as we could. Have decided to sell camels to another party. Our next herd will be here in six months." "How could you do this to me?" the Samaritan screams at (the recovering man, waving the message in the air. "Look what you've done now! You've caused me to lose those camels that I needed for my business. Now I can't deliver my goods. This may put me out of business! How could you do this to me?"

At some level this story may be familiar to all of us. We may be moved with compassion to give to someone in need, but then this person manipulates us into giving more than we want to give, we end up resentful and angry, having missed something we needed in our own life. Or, we may want more from someone else, and we pressure them until they give in. They give not out of their heart and free will, but out of compliance, and they resent us for what they give. Neither one of us comes out ahead.

To avoid these scenarios, we need to look at what falls within our boundaries, what we are responsible for.

Feelings

We are responsible for our feelings. Feelings have gotten a bad rap in the Christian world. They have been called everything from unimportant to fleshly. At the same time, example after example shows how our feelings play an enormous role in our motivation and behavior. How many times have you seen people do ungodly things to one another because of hurt feelings? Or how many times has someone had to be hospitalized for depression after years and years of trying to ignore the way they felt until they became suicidal?

Feelings should neither be ignored nor placed in charge. The Bible says to "own" your feelings and be aware of them. They can often motivate you to do much good. The Good Samaritan's pity moved him to go to the injured Israelite (Luke 10:33). The father was filled with compassion for his lost son and threw his arms around him (Luke 15:20). Many times Jesus "had compassion" for the people to whom He ministered (Matt. 9:36; 15:32).

Feelings come from your heart and can tell you the state of your relationships. They can tell you if things are going well, or if there is a problem. If you feel close and loving, things are probably going well. If you feel angry, you have a problem that needs to be addressed. But the point is, your feelings are **your** responsibility and you must own them and see them as your problem so you can begin to find an answer to whatever issue they are pointing to.

Attitudes and Beliefs

Attitudes have to do with your orientation toward something, the stance you take toward others, God, life, work,

and relationships. Beliefs are anything that you accept as true. Often we do not see an attitude, or belief, as the source of discomfort in our life. We blame other people as did our first parents, Adam and Eve. We need to **own** our attitudes and convictions because they fall within our property line. We are the ones who feel their effect, and the only ones that can change them.

The tough thing about attitudes is that we learn them very early in life. They play a big part in the map of where and how we operate. People who have never questioned their attitudes and beliefs can fall prey to the dynamic Jesus referred to when he described people holding the "traditions of men," instead of the commandments of God (Mark 7:8; Matt. 15:3).

People with issues setting limits usually have unbiblical attitudes about responsibility. They feel that to hold others responsible for their feelings, choices, and behavior implies being 'mean' However, Proverbs repeatedly says that setting and accepting responsibility will save lives (Prov. 13).

Behaviors

Behaviors have consequences. As Paul says, reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7-8). If we study, we will get good grades. If we go to work, we will get a paycheck, if we exercise, we will be in better health. If we act lovingly toward others, we will have closer relationships. On the negative side, if we sow idleness, irresponsibility, uncontrolled behavior, we can expect to reap poverty, failure and the effects of loose living. These are natural consequences of our behavior.

The problem comes when someone interrupts the law of sowing and reaping in another's life. A person's drinking or abuse should have consequences for the drinker or abuser. "Stern discipline awaits him who leaves the path" (Prov. 15:10). To rescue people from the natural consequences of their behavior is to render them powerless. This happens a lot with parents and children. Parents often yell and nag, instead of allowing their children to reap the natural consequences of their behavior. Parenting with love and limits, with warmth and consequences, produces confident children who have a sense of control over their lives.

Choices

We need to take responsibility for our choices. This leads to the fruit of "self-control" (Gal. 5:23). A common boundary problem is disowning our choices and trying to lay the responsibility for them on someone else. Think for a moment how often we use the phrases, "I had to" or "She (he) made me" when explaining why we did or did not do something. These phrases betray our basic illusion that we are not active participants in many of our dealings. We think someone else is in control, thus relieving us of our basic responsibility.

We need to realize that we are in control of our choices, no matter how we feel. This keeps us from making choices to give "reluctantly or under compulsion," as II Corinthians 9:7 says. Paul would not even accept a gift that he felt was given because the giver felt he "had to" give it. He once sent a gift back so "that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced" (Philem. 1:14). Joshua said the same thing to the people in his well known "choice" verse: **"But if serving the Lord seems**

undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15).

Jesus said a similar thing to the worker who was angry about the wage for which he had agreed to work: "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?" (Matt. 20:13). The man had made a free choice to work for a certain amount and was angry because someone who had worked fewer hours had gotten the same wage. Another example is the prodigal son's brother, who had chosen to stay home and serve and then was resentful. Not satisfied with his choice, he needed to be reminded that he made a choice to stay home.

Throughout the Scriptures, people are reminded of their choices and asked to take responsibility for them. Like Paul says, if we choose to live by the Spirit, we will live; if we choose to follow our sinful nature, we will die (Rom. 8:13). Making decisions based on others' approval or our own guilt breeds resentment, a product of our sinful nature. We have been so trained by others on what we "should" do that we think we are being loving when we do things out of **compulsion**.

Setting boundaries inevitably involves taking responsibility for your choices. You are the one who makes them. **You** are the one who must live with their consequences. And **you** are the one who may be keeping yourself from making the choices **you** could be happy with.

Values

What we value is what we love and assign importance to. Often we do not take responsibility for what we

value. We are caught up in valuing the approval of men rather than the approval of God (John 12:43); because of this misplaced value, we miss out on life. We think that power, riches, and pleasure will satisfy our deepest longing, which is really for love.

When we take responsibility for out-of-control behavior caused by loving the wrong things, or valuing things that have no lasting value, **when we confess that we have a heart that values things that will not satisfy**, we can receive help from God and his people to "create a new heart" within us. Setting limits help us not to deny but to own our old hurtful values so God can change them.

Limits

Two aspects of limits stand out when it comes to creating boundaries. The first is **setting limits on others**. This is the component that we most often hear about when we talk about boundaries. In reality, setting limits on others is a misnomer. We can't do that. What we can do is set limits on our own exposure to people who are behaving poorly; we can't change them or make them behave right.

Our model is God. He does not really "set limits" on people to "make them" behave. God sets standards, but He lds people for who they are and then separates Himself from them when they misbehave, saying in effect, "You can be that way if you choose, but you cannot come into my house." Heaven is a place for the repentant, and all are welcome. But God limits His exposure to evil, unrepentant people, and so should we. Scripture is full of admonitions to separate ourselves from people who act in destructive ways (Matt. 18:15-17;

I Cor. 5:9-13). We are not being unloving. Separating ourselves protects love, because we are taking a stand against things that destroy love.

The other aspect of limits that is helpful when talking about boundaries is setting our own internal limits. We need to have spaces inside ourselves where we can have a feeling, an impulse, or a desire, without acting it out. We need self-control without repression. In the Bible it is called temperance.

We need to be able to say 'no' to ourselves. This includes both our destructive desires and some good ones that are not wise to pursue at a given time. Internal structure is a very important component of boundaries and identity, as well as ownership, responsibility, and self-control. We will discuss internal limits in more detail later.

Talents

Contrast these two responses:

"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been; faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

"You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents." (Matt. 25:23, 26-28)

No other passage better illustrates God-ordained responsibility for ownership and use of talents. Although the example is of money, it also applies to internal talents and gifts. Our talents are clearly within our boundaries and are our responsibility. Yet taking ownership of them is often frightening and always risky.

The parable of the talents says that we are accountable - not to mention much happier - when we are exercising our gifts and being productive. **It takes work, practice, learning, prayer, resources, and grace to overcome the fear of failure that the "wicked and lazy" servant gave in to.** They were chastised for being afraid; we are all afraid when trying something new and difficult. He was chastised for not confronting his fear and trying the best he could. Not confronting our fear denies the grace of God and insults both His giving of the gift and His grace to sustain us as we are learning.

Our minds and thoughts are important reflections of the image of God. No other creature on earth has our thinking ability. We are the only creatures who are called to love God with all our mind (Mark 12:30). And Paul wrote that he was taking "captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (II Cor. 10:5). Establishing boundaries in thinking involves three things.

1. **We must own our own thoughts.** Many people have not taken ownership of their own thinking processes. They are mechanically thinking the thoughts of others without ever examining them. They swallow others' opinions and reasonings, never questioning and "thinking about their thinking." Certainly we should listen to the thoughts of others and weigh them; but we should never "give our minds" over to anyone. We are

to weigh things for ourselves in the context of relationship, "sharpening" each other as iron, but remaining separate thinkers.

2. **We must grow in knowledge and expand our minds.** One area in which we need to grow is in knowledge of God and His Word. David said of knowing God's Word, **"My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors" (Ps. 119:20, 24).** We also learn much about God by studying His creation and His work. In learning about His world, we obey the commandment to "rule and subdue" the earth and all that is within it. We must learn about the world that He has given us to become wise stewards. Whether we are doing brain surgery, balancing our checkbook, or raising children, we are to use our brains to have better lives and glorify God.

3. **We must clarify distorted thinking.** We all have a tendency to not see things clearly, to think and perceive in distorted ways. Probably the easiest distortions to notice are in personal relationships. We rarely see people as they really are; our perceptions are distorted by past relationships and our own preconceptions of who we think they are, even the people we know best. We do not see clearly because of the "logs" in our eyes (Matt. 7:3-5).

Taking ownership of our thinking in relationships requires being active in checking out where we may be wrong. As we assimilate new information, our thinking adapts and grows closer to reality.

Also we need to make sure that we are communicating our thoughts to others. Many people think that others

should be able to read their minds and know what they want. This leads to frustration. Even Paul says, **"For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him?"** (1 Cor. 2:11). What a great statement about boundaries! We have our own thoughts, and if we want others to know them, we must tell them.

Desires

Each of us has different desires and wants, dreams and wishes, goals and plans, hungers and thirsts. We all want to satisfy "me." But why are there so few satisfied "me's" around?

Part of the problem lies in the lack of structured boundaries within our personality. We can't define who the real "me" is and what we truly desire. Many desires masquerade as the real thing. They are lusts that come out of not owning our real desires. For example, many sex addicts are looking for sexual experiences, but what they really desire is love and affection.

James writes about this problem of not owning and seeking our real desires with pure motives: **"You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures"** (James 4:2-3).

We often do not actively seek our desires from God, and those desires are mixed up with things that we do not really need. God is truly interested in our desires; He made them. Consider the following: **"You have granted**

him the desire of his heart and have not withheld the request of his lips. You welcomed him with rich blessings and placed a crown of pure gold on his head" (Ps. 21:2-3). "Delight yourself in the lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4). "He fulfills the desires of those who fear him" (Ps. 145:19).

God loves to give gifts to His children, but He is a wise parent. He makes sure His gifts are right for us. To know what to ask for, we have to be in touch with who we really are and what are our real motives. If we are wanting something to feed our pride or to enhance our ego, I doubt that God is interested in giving it to us. But if it would be good for us, He's very interested.

We are also commanded to play an active role in seeking our desires (Phil. 2:12-13; Ecc. 11:9; Matt. 7:7-11). We need to own our desires and pursue them to find fulfillment in life. "A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul" (Prov. 13:19 KJV), but it sure is a lot of work!

Love

Our ability to give and respond to love is our greatest gift. The heart that God has fashioned in His image is the center of our being. Its abilities to open up to love and to allow love to flow outward are crucial to life.

Some people have difficulty giving and receiving love because of hurt and fear. Having closed their heart to others, they feel empty and meaningless. The Bible is clear about both functions of the heart: the receiving of grace and love **inward** and the flow **outward**.

Listen to how the Bible tells how we should love: "**Love**

the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . . Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39). And how we should receive love: "We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange - speak as to my children - open wide your hearts also" (I Cor. 6:11-13).

Our loving heart, like our physical one, needs an inflow as well as an outflow of lifeblood. And like its physical counterpart, our heart is a muscle, a trust muscle. This trust muscle needs to be used and exercised; if it is injured it will slow down or weaken.

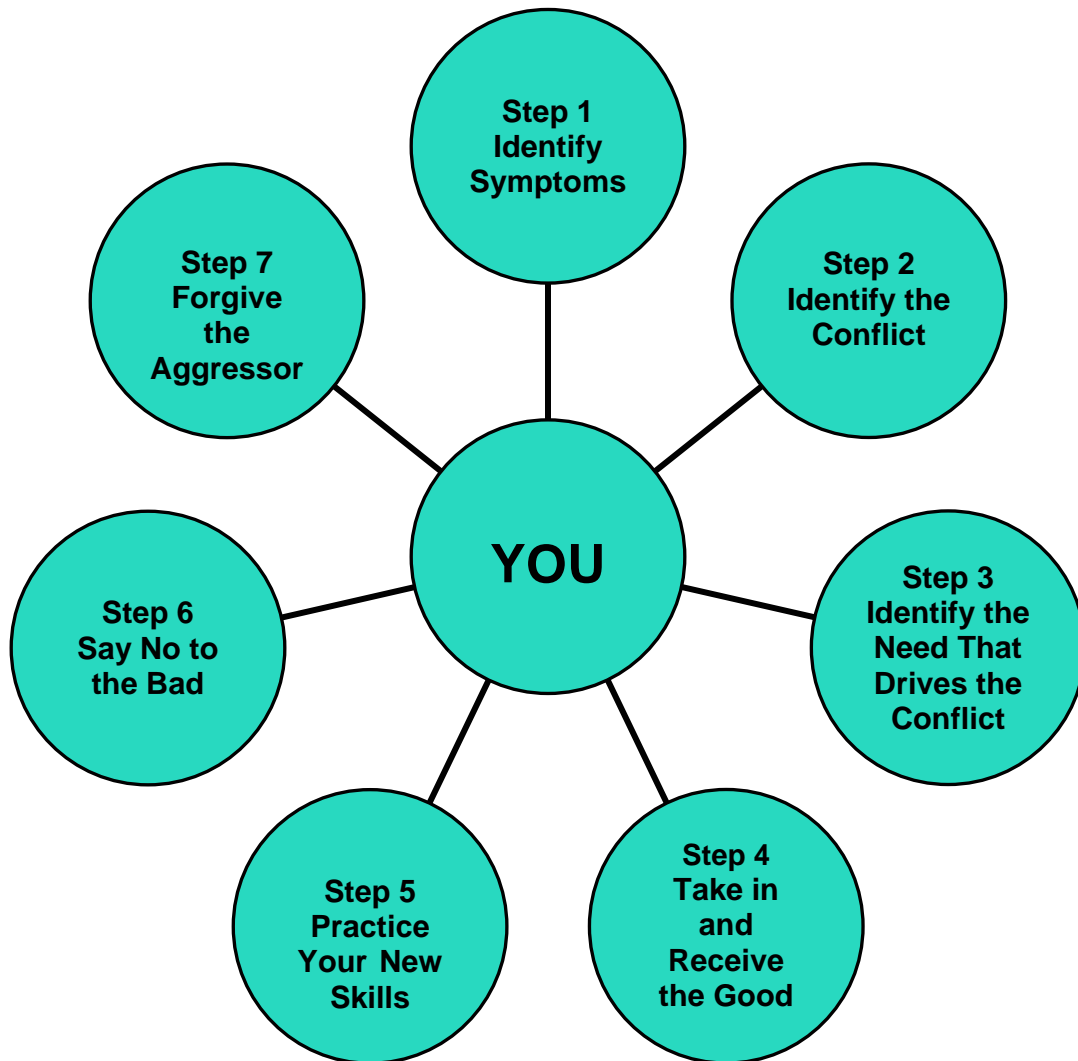
We need to take responsibility for this loving function of ourselves and use it. Love **concealed** or love **rejected** can both damage us.

There are individuals who do not take ownership for how they resist love. They have a lot of love around them, but do not realize that their loneliness is a result of their own lack of responsiveness. We maneuver subtly to avoid responsibility in love; we need to claim our hearts as our property and work on our weaknesses in that area. It will open up life to us.

We need to take responsibility for all of the above areas of our souls. These lay within our boundaries. But taking care of what lay within our boundaries isn't easy; neither is allowing other people to take care of what lay within their boundaries. Setting boundaries and maintaining them is hard work.

Families of Origin

Establishing limitations with families of origin is a tough task, but one with great reward. It is a process, with certain distinguishable steps:



Step 1- Symptoms

Look at your own life situation and see where limitation issues exist with your parents and siblings. The basic question is this: Where have you lost control of your property? Identify those areas and see their connection with the family you grew up in, and you are on your way.

Step 2- Identify the Conflict

Discover what dynamic is being played out. For example, what "Kingdom Law" are you violating? Do you triangulate? Do you take responsibility for a sibling or parent instead of being responsible to them? Do you fail to enforce consequences and end up paying for their behavior? Are you passive and reactive toward them and the conflict?

You cannot stop acting out a dynamic until you understand what you are doing. "Take the log out" of your own eye. Then, you will be able to see clearly to deal with your family members. See yourself with the issue and define your **Kingdom Law** violations.

Step 3-Identify the Need That Drives the Conflict

You do not act in inappropriate ways for no reason. You are often trying to meet some underlying need that your family of origin did not meet. Maybe we are still entangled because of a need to be loved, or approved of, or accepted. You must face this deficit and accept that it can only be met in your new family of God, those who are now your true "mother, father, brothers, and sisters," those who do God's will and can love you the way He designed.

Step 4-Take in and Receive the Good

It is not enough to understand your need. You must get it resolved. God is willing to meet your needs through His people, but you must humble yourself, reach out to a good support system, and take in the good. Do not continue to hide your talent in the ground and expect to get better. Learn to respond to and receive love, even if you're clumsy at first.

Step 5-Practice Your New Skills

Your boundary skills are fragile and new. Setting limits is a new thing for you and you can't take them immediately into a difficult situation. Practice them in situations where they will be honored and respected. Begin saying "no" to people in your supportive group who will love and respect your boundaries.

When you are recovering from a physical injury, you do not pick up the heaviest weight first. You build up to the heavy stuff. Look at it as you would physical therapy.

Step 6-Say No to the Bad

In addition to practicing new skills in safe situations, avoid hurtful situations. When you are in the beginning stages of recovery, you need to avoid people who have abused and controlled you in the past.

When you think you are ready to reestablish a relationship with someone who has been abusive and controlling in the past, bring a friend or supporter along. Be aware of your pull toward hurtful situations and relationships. The injury you are recovering from is

serious, and you can't reestablish a relationship until you have the proper tools. Be careful to not get sucked into a controlling situation again because your wish for reconciliation is so strong.

Step 7-Forgive the Aggressor

Nothing clarifies recovery more than forgiveness. To forgive someone means to let him off the hook, or to cancel the debt he owes you. When you refuse to forgive someone, you still want something from that person, and even if its revenge that you want, it keeps you tied to them forever.

Refusing to forgive a family member is one of the main reasons people are stuck for years, unable to separate from their dysfunctional origin families. They still want something from them. It is much better to receive grace from God, who has something to give, and to forgive those who have no emotional currency to pay their debt with. This ends your suffering, because it ends the wish for repayment that is never forthcoming and that makes your heart sick because your hope is deferred (Prov. 13:12).

If you do not forgive, you are demanding something your offender does not choose to give, even if it is only a confession of what they did. This "ties" that person to you and ruins your chances for recovery. Let go of the dysfunctional family you came from go. Cut it loose, and you will be free.

Respond, Don't React

When you **react** to something that someone says or

does, you may have an issue with setting limits. If someone is able to cause havoc by doing or saying something, they are in control of you at that point, and your boundaries are lost. When you **respond**, you remain in control, with options and choices.

If you feel yourself reacting, step away and regain control of yourself so family members can't force you to do or say something you do not want to do or say and something that violates your separateness. When you have kept your boundaries, choose the best option. The difference between responding and reacting is choice. **When you are reacting, they are in control. When you respond, you are.**

Step 8-Setting Boundaries

The best boundaries are loving ones. The person who has to remain forever in a protective mode is losing out on love and freedom. Boundaries in no way mean to stop loving. They mean the opposite: you are gaining freedom to love. It is good to sacrifice and deny yourself for the sake of others. But you need boundaries to make that choice.

Practice purposeful giving to increase your freedom. Sometimes people who are building boundaries feel that to do someone a favor is codependent. Nothing is farther from the truth. Doing good for someone, when you freely choose to do it, is boundary enhancing. Codependents are not doing good; they are allowing evil because they are afraid; afraid to set limits, afraid to say "no."

The saddest people on earth are those who end their

days with no relationships in which they are truly known and loved.

Setting Limits With Friends

Friendship can be a broad category; most of the relationships mentioned in this message have friendship components. Let's define friendship as comprising of people we want to be around just for our own sake.

What If My Closest Friends Are My Family?

Individuals sometimes say, "But my mother (or father, or sister, or brother) is my best friend." They often feel fortunate that, in these times of family stress, their best friends are the family in which they were raised. They don't think they need an intimate circle of friends besides their own parents and siblings.

They misunderstand the biblical function of the family. God intended the family to be an incubator in which we grow the maturity, tools, and abilities we need. Once the incubator has done its job, then, it's supposed to encourage the young adult to leave the nest and connect to the outside world (Gen. 2:24), to establish a spiritual and emotional family system on one's own. The adult is free to do whatever God has designed for him or her.

Over time, we are to accomplish God's purposes of spreading his love to the world, to make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:19-20). Staying emotionally locked in to the family of origin frustrates this purpose. It's hard to see how we'll change the world when we have to live on the same street.

No one can become a truly biblical adult without setting

some limits, leaving home, and cleaving somewhere else. Otherwise, we never know if we have forged our own values, beliefs, and convictions-our very identity-or if we are mimicking the ideas of our family.

Can family be friends? Absolutely. But if you have never questioned, set boundaries, or experienced conflict with your family's traditions, you may not have an adult-to-adult connection with your family. If you have no other "best friends" than your family, you need to take a close look at those relationships. You may be afraid of separating and individuating, of becoming an autonomous adult.

What Does The Bible Say About Friendship?

The Bible teaches that all commitment is based on a loving relationship. Being loved leads to commitment and willful decision-making-not the reverse.

How does this apply to friendships? Look at it this way, how would you feel if your best friend approached you and said: "I just wanted to tell you that the only reason we're friends is because I'm committed to our friendship. There' nothing that draws me to you. I don't particularly enjoy your company. But I will keep choosing to be your friend."

You probably wouldn't feel very safe or cherished in this relationship. You'd suspect you were being befriended out of obligation, not out of love. Don't let anyone fool you. A friendships need to be based on attachment, or they have shaky foundation.

It's amazing to realize that the only thing holding our

friends to us isn't our performance, or our lovability, or their guilt, or their obligation. The only thing that will keep them calling, spending time with us, and putting up with us is love. And that's the one thing we can't control. At any moment, any person can walk away from a friendship. However, as we enter more and more into an attachment-based life, we learn to trust love. We learn that the bonds of a true friendship are not easily broken. And we learn that, in a good relationship, we can set limits that will strengthen, not injure, the connection.

What About Romantic Friendships?

Single Christians have tremendous struggles with learning to be truth-tellers and limit-setters in romantic, dating friendships. Most of the conflicts revolve around the fear of losing the relationship.

A couple of unique principles operate in the romantic sphere:

1. **Romantic relationships are, by nature, risky.** Many singles who have not developed good attachments with other people and who have not had their boundaries respected try to learn the rules of biblical friendships by dating. They hope that the safety of these relationships will help them learn to love, be loved, and set limits.

Quite often, these individuals come out of a few months of dating more injured than when they went in. They may feel let down, put down, or used. This is not a dating problem. It's a problem in understanding the purpose of dating.

Dating is a means to find out what kind of person we

complement and with whom we are spiritually and emotionally compatible. The end goal of dating is generally to decide, sooner or later, whether or not to marry. It's a training ground.

This fact causes a built-in conflict. When we date, we have the freedom to say, at any time, "This isn't working out," and to end the relationship. The other person has the same freedom.

What does this mean for the person who has been wounded in the past? Often, the individual brings immature, undeveloped aspects of their character to an adult romantic situation. In an arena of low commitment and high risk, they seek the safety, bonding, and consistency that their wounds need. They entrust themselves too quickly to someone whom they are dating because their needs are so intense. And they will be devastated when things "don't work out."

It is a little like sending a three-year-old to the front lines of battle. Dating is a way for adults to find out about each other's suitability for marriage; it's not a place for young, injured souls to find healing. This healing can best be found in nonromantic arenas, such as support groups. We need to keep separate the purposes of romantic and nonromantic friendships.

It's best to learn the skill of setting limits in these nonromantic arenas, where the attachments and commitments are greater. Once we've learned to recognize, set, and keep our biblical boundaries, we can use them on the adult playground called dating.

2. **Setting limits in romance is necessary.** Individuals

with mature boundaries sometimes **suspend** them in the initial stages of a dating relationship in order to please the other person. However, truth-telling in romance helps define the relationship. It helps each person to know where he starts and the other person stops. Ignorance of one another's boundaries is one of the most blatant **red flags** of a unhealthy dating relationship.

What About Needed Friends?

I was talking to a woman one day in a counseling session who felt extremely isolated and out of control. Setting limits with her friends seemed impossible for her; they were in perpetual crisis.

I asked her to describe the quality of her relationships. "Oh, I've got lots of friends. I volunteer at the church two nights a week. I teach a Bible study once a week. I'm on a couple of church committees, and I sing in the choir."

"I'm getting exhausted just listening to you describe your week," I said. "But what about the quality of these relationships?"

"They're great. People are being helped. They're growing in their faith, and troubled marriages are getting healed."

"You know," I said, "I'm asking you about friendships, and you're answering about ministries. They're not the same thing."

She had never considered the difference. Her concept of friendship was to find people with needs and throw herself into a relationship with them. She didn't know

how to ask for things for herself.

And that was the source of her boundary conflicts. Without these "ministry relationships," this woman would have had nothing. So she couldn't say **no**. Saying **no** would have plummeted her into isolation, which would have been intolerable.

But it had happened anyway: she had called for help because of burnout.

When the Bible tells us to comfort with the comfort with which we are comforted (II Cor. 1:4), it's telling us something. We need to be comforted before we can comfort. That may mean setting boundaries on our ministries so that we can be nurtured by our friends. We must distinguish between the two.

Conclusion

A prayerful look at your friendships will determine whether you need to begin setting limits with some of your friends. By setting boundaries, you may save some important ones from declining. And when romantic, dating relationships lead to marriage, you will still need to remember how to build and maintain boundaries even in this most intimate of human relationships.

Setting Limits In Marriage

If there ever were a relationship where sitting limits can get confused, it is marriage, where by design husband and wife "become one flesh" (Eph. 5:31). Boundaries foster separateness. Marriage has as one of its goals the giving up of separateness and becoming, instead of two, one. What a potential state of confusion, especially for someone who does not have clear boundaries to begin with!

More marriages fail because of poor boundaries than for any other reason. This session will apply the laws of boundaries, as well as its myths, to the marital relationship.

Is This Yours, Mine, or Ours?

A marriage mirrors the relationship that Christ has with his bride, the church. Christ has some things that only He can do, the church has some things that only it can do, and they have some things they do together. Only Christ could die. Only the church can represent Him on earth in His absence and obey His commands. And together, they work on many things, such as saving the lost. Similarly, in marriage, some duties one spouse does, some the other does, and some they do together. When the two become one on their wedding day, spouses do not lose their individual identities. Each participates in the relationship, and each has his or her own life.

No one would have a problem deciding who wears the dress and who wears the tie. It's a little trickier to decide

who balances the checkbook and who mows the lawn. But these duties can be worked out according to the spouses' individual abilities and interests. Where boundaries can get confusing is in the elements of personhood—the elements of the soul that each person possesses and can choose to share with someone else.

The problem arises when one trespasses on the other's personhood, when one crosses a line and tries to control the feelings, attitudes, behaviors, choices, and values of the other. These things only each individual can control. To try to control these things is to violate someone's boundaries, and ultimately, it will fail. Our relationship with Christ and any other successful relationship is based on freedom. The freedom of choice.

Let's look at some common examples:

Feelings

One of the most important elements that promotes intimacy between two people is the ability of each to take responsibility for his or her own feelings.

I was counseling a couple who were having marital problems because of the husband's drinking. I asked the wife to tell her husband how she felt when he drank.

"I feel like he doesn't think about what he's doing. I feel like he . . ."

"No, you are evaluating his drinking. How do you feel about it?"

"I feel like he doesn't care. . . ."

"No," I said, "That is what you **think** about him. How do you **feel** when he drinks?"

She started to cry. "I feel very alone and afraid." She had finally said what she felt.

At that point her husband reached out and put his hand on her arm. "I never knew you were afraid," he said. "I would never want to make you afraid."

This conversation was a real turning point in their relationship. For years the wife had been nagging her husband about the way he was and about the way he should be. He responded by blaming her and justifying his actions. In spite of hours and hours of talking, they had continued to talk past each other. Neither was taking responsibility for his or her own feelings and communicating them.

We do not communicate our feelings by saying, "I feel that you . . ." We communicate our feelings by saying, "I feel sad, or hurt, or lonely, or scared, or . . ." Such vulnerability is the beginning of intimacy and caring.

Feelings are also a warning signal telling us that we need to do something. For example, if you are angry at someone for something she did, it is your responsibility to go to her and tell her you are angry and why. If you think that your anger is her problem and that she needs to fix it, you may wait years. And your anger may turn to bitterness. If you are angry, even if someone else has sinned against you, it is your responsibility to do something about it.

Last year I counseled a couple Jimmy and Ann. When

her husband, Jimmy, did not come home from work early enough for them to have time together, Ann became angry. Instead of confronting her husband, she would become very quiet for the rest of the evening. Jimmy became annoyed with having to pull out of her what was wrong. Eventually, hating her pouting, he left her alone.

Not dealing with hurt or anger can kill a relationship. Ann needed to talk with Jimmy about how she was feeling, instead of waiting for him to draw her out. Even though she felt he had been the one who had hurt her, she needed to take responsibility for her own hurt and anger.

Jimmy and Ann did not solve their problem by her simply expressing her anger to him. She needed to go one more step. She needed to clarify her desires in the conflict.

Desires

Desires are another element of personhood that each spouse needs to take responsibility for. Ann was angry because she wanted Jimmy to be home. She blamed him for being late. When I spoke to both them via speakerphone, our conversation went like this:

"Ann, tell me why you get angry at Jimmy," I said.

"Because he's late," she replied.

"That can't be the reason," I said. "People don't make

other people angry. Your anger has to come from something where inside of you."

"What do you mean? He's the one who comes home late."

"Well, what if you had plans to go to the movies with your friends that night? Would you still be angry at him for being late?"

"Well, no. That's different."

"What's different? You said you –were angry because he was late, and he would still be late, yet you wouldn't be angry."

"Well, in that situation, he wouldn't be doing anything to hurt me."

"Not exactly," I pointed out. "The difference is that you wouldn't be wanting something that he didn't want to give. Your disappointed desire is what hurts you, not his being late. The problem lay in who is responsible for the want. It is your want, not his. You are responsible for getting it fulfilled. That is a rule of life. We do not get everything we want, and we all must grieve over our disappointments instead of punishing others for them."

"What about common respect? Staying at the office is selfish," she said.

"Well, he wants to work some nights and you want him home. Both of you want something for yourselves. We could say that you are as selfish as he is. The truth is that neither one of you is selfish. You just have conflicting wants. This is what marriage is about - getting conflicting wants worked out."

There was no "bad guy" in this situation. Both Jimmy and Ann had needs. Jimmy needed to work late, and Ann needed him home. Problems arise when we make someone else responsible for our needs and wants, and when we blame them for our disappointments.

Limits on What I Can Give

We are finite creatures and must give as we "decide in [our] heart to give" (II Cor. 9:7), being aware of when we are giving past the love point to the resentment point. Problems arise when we blame someone else for our own lack of limits. Often spouses will do more than they really want to and then resent the other for not stopping them from overgiving.

Bob, a former co-worker of mine had this problem. His wife, Nancy, wanted the perfect home, including handmade patios, landscaping, and remodeling. She was always coming up with something for him to do around the house. He was beginning to resent her projects.

When he and I talked, I asked him why he was angry.

"Well, because she wants so much. I can't find any time for myself," he said.

"What do you mean 'can't'? Don't you mean 'won't'?"

"No, I **can't**. She would be angry if I didn't do the work."

"Well, that's her problem; it's her anger."

"Yes, but I have to listen to it."

"No, you don't," I said. "You are choosing to do all of these things for her, and you are choosing to take the tongue lashings that happen if you don't. Any time you spend doing things for her is a gift from you; if you do not want to give it, you don't have to. Stop blaming her for all of this."

Bob didn't like that. He wanted her to stop wanting instead of his learning to say 'no'.

"How much time do you want to give her each week for home improvement?" I asked.

He thought for a minute. "About four hours. I could work on things for her and still have a little time left for a hobby."

"Then tell her that you have been thinking about your time and that with all the other things you are doing for the family, you would like to give her four hours a week to work around the house, she is free to use that time any way she chooses."

"But what if she says that four hours is not enough?"

"Explain to her that you understand that this may not be enough time to complete all the jobs she wants done, but those are her wants, not yours. Therefore, she is responsible for her own wants, and she is free to be creative in how she gets them done. She could earn some extra money and hire someone. She could learn to do them herself. She could ask a friend to help. Or, she could cut down on her wants. It is important that she learns that you are not going to take responsibility for her wants. You're going to give up to your limit, and she is responsible for the rest."

Bob saw the logic in my suggestion and decided to discuss it with Nancy. It was not pretty at first. No one had ever said 'no' to Nancy before, and she did not take it well. But, in time Bob took responsibility for his limits instead of wishing that Nancy would not want so much. She learned something that she had never known before: the world does not exist for her. Other people are not extensions of her wants and desires. Other people have wants and needs of their own, and we must negotiate them in a loving relationship and respect each other's limits.

The key here is that the other person is not responsible for our limits; we are. Only we know what we can and can not give, and only we can be responsible for drawing that line. If we do not draw it, we can quickly become resentful.

Applying Kingdom Laws to Marriage

In the manual "Kingdom Laws II," we talked about the ten laws of setting limits. Let's apply a few of those laws to troubled marital situations:

Many times one spouse may be out of control but not suffer the consequences of this behavior. The husband yells at his wife, and she tries to be more loving. In effect the evil (yelling) produces good things (more loving) for him Or, a wife overspends, and her husband pays the consequences. He gets a second job to cover the mounting bills.

Natural consequences are needed to resolve these problems. A wife needs to tell her overly critical husband that if he continues to berate her, she will go into another room until he can discuss the problem

rationally. Or, she could say something like, "I will not talk about this issue with you anymore alone. I will only talk in the presence of a counselor." Or, "If you start yelling at me again, I will go to Martha's house to spend the night." The husband with the spendthrift wife needs to put a limit on the credit cards.

All of them need to let the out-of-control spouses suffer the consequences of their actions.

A friend of mine decided to let his wife suffer the consequences of her chronic lateness. He had nagged and nagged his wife about her tardiness, to no avail. Finally, he realized he could not change her; he could only change his response to her. Tired of suffering the consequences of her behavior, he decided to give them back to her.

One night they had plans to go to a banquet, and he did not want to be late. In advance, he told her that he wanted to be on time and that if she were not ready by 6:00 p.m., he would leave without her. She was late, and he left. When he came home that night, she screamed, "How could you leave without me!" He let her know that her lateness was what caused her to miss the banquet and that he was sad to have to go alone, but he did not want to miss the dinner. After a few more incidents like this, she knew that her lateness would affect her and not him, and she changed.

These moves are not manipulative, as the other spouse will accuse. They are examples of someone limiting how they will allow themselves to be treated and exhibiting self-control. The natural consequences are falling on the shoulders of the responsible party.

The Law of Responsibility

We talked earlier about taking responsibility **for** ourselves and having responsibility **to** others. The above examples show that. People who set limits exhibit self-control and show responsibility for themselves. They act responsible to their partner by confronting him or her. Setting limits is an act of love in the marriage; by binding and limiting the evil, they protect the good.

Taking responsibility for someone's anger, pouting, and disappointments by giving in to that person's demands or controlling behavior destroys love in a marriage. Instead of taking responsibility **for** people we love, or rescuing them, we need to show responsibility **to** them by confronting evil when we see it. This is truly loving our partner and the marriage. The most responsible behavior possible is often the most difficult.

The Law of Power

We have looked at our basic inability to change a person. A nagging spouse, in effect, keeps the problem going. Accepting someone as they are, respecting their needs, and then giving them the appropriate consequences is the better path. When we do this, we execute the power we do have, and we stop trying to wield the power has. Contrast these ways of reacting:

Examples of the Law of Power in Action

BEFORE LIMITS

"Stop yelling at me.

You must be nicer."

"You've just got to stop drinking. It's ruining our family. Please listen. You're wrecking our lives."

You are perverted to look at pornography. That's so degrading. What kind of a sick person are you anyway?"

AFTER LIMITS

"You can continue to choose to yell. But I choose not to be in your presence when you do.

"You may choose not to deal with your drinking if you want. But I will not continue to expose the children to the chaos it brings. The next time you come home drunk we will leave.

I choose not to share you sexually with naked women in magazines. I will only be with someone who is interested in me. Make up your mind and choose which it will be.

These are all examples of taking power over what you do have power over - yourself - and giving up trying to control and have power over someone else.

The Law of Evaluation

When you confront your husband or wife and begin to set boundaries, your partner may be hurt. In evaluating the pain that your boundary setting causes your spouse, remember that love and limits go together. When you set boundaries, be lovingly responsible to the person in pain.

Spouses who are wise and loving will accept limits and act responsibly toward them. Spouses who are controlling and self-centered will react angrily.

Remember that a boundary always deals with yourself, not the other person. You are not demanding that your spouse do something - even respect your boundaries. You are setting boundaries to say what you will do or will not do. Only these kinds of boundaries are enforceable, for you **do have control over yourself. Do not confuse boundaries with a new way to control a spouse. It is the opposite. It is giving up control and beginning to love. You are giving up trying to control your spouse and allowing them to take responsibility for their own behavior.**

The Law of Exposure

In a marriage, as in no other relationship, the need for revealing your boundaries is important. Passive boundaries, such as withdrawal, triangulation, pouting, affairs, and passive-aggressive behavior, are extremely

destructive to a relationship. Passive ways of showing people that they do not have control over you never lead to intimacy. They never educate the other on who you really are.

Limits need to be communicated first verbally and then with actions. They need to be clear and unapologetic. Remember the types of boundaries we listed earlier: skin, words, truth, physical space, time and emotional distance, are consequences. All of these limits need to be revealed and inspected at different times in marriage.

Skin. Each spouse needs to respect the other's physical body boundaries. Physical boundary violations can range from hurtful displays of affection to physical abuse. The Bible says that the husband and wife have "authority" over each other's body (I Cor. 7:4-6); this is mutual authority, given freely. One should always remember Jesus' principle: "Treat others as you would want to be treated."

Words. Your words need to be clear and spoken in love. Confront your spouse directly. Say **no**. Don't use passive resistance. Don't pout or withdraw. Say things like, "I do not feel comfortable with that. I do not want to. I won't."

Truth. Paul says that "each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully" (Eph. 4:25). Honest communication is always best. This includes telling the other person when he is not aware that he is violating one of God's standards. You also need to own the truth about your feelings and hurts and communicate those feelings directly to your spouse **with love**.

Physical Space. When you need time away, tell your spouse. Sometimes you need space for nourishment; other times you need space for limit setting. In either instance, your spouse should not have to guess why you do not want him around for a while. Communicate clearly so your spouse does not feel as though he is being punished, but knows he is experiencing the consequences of his out-of-control behavior (Matt. 18:17; I Cor. 5:9-13).

Emotional Distance. If you are in a troubled marriage, where your partner has had an affair, for example, you may need emotional space. Waiting to trust again is wise. You need to see if your spouse is truly repentant, and your spouse needs to see that their behavior has a cost. Your spouse may interpret this as punishment, but the Bible teaches that we are to judge a person by their actions, not by their words (James 2:14-26).

In addition, a hurt heart takes time to heal. You cannot rush back into a position of trust with too much unresolved hurt. That hurt needs to be exposed and communicated. If you are hurting, you need to own that hurt.

Time. Each spouse needs time apart from the relationship. Not just for limit setting, as I pointed out above, but for self-nourishment. The Proverbs 31 wife has a life of her own; she is out doing many things. The same is true of her husband. They have their own time for doing what they like and for seeing their own friends.

Many couples have trouble with this aspect of marriage. They feel abandoned when their spouse wants time apart. In reality, spouses need time apart, which makes

them realize the need to be back together. Spouses in healthy relationships cherish each other's space and are champions of each other's causes.

Other People. Some spouses need the support of others to set boundaries. If they haven't ever stood up for themselves, they need help from friends and the church in learning how. If you are too weak to set and enforce boundaries, get help from supporters outside your marriage. **Do not**, however, seek support from someone of the opposite sex that could lead to an affair. Get help from other people within relationships that have built-in boundaries, such as counselors or support groups.

Consequences. Communicate consequences clearly and enforce them firmly as you have said you would. Spelling out consequences **in advance** and enforcing them gives your spouse a choice about whether or not he or she wants the consequences to happen. Because people have control over their own behavior, they have control over the consequences of that behavior.

That Doesn't Sound Like Submission

Whenever I talk about a wife setting limits, someone asks about the biblical idea of submission. What follows is not a full treatise on submission, but some general issues you should keep in mind.

First, both husbands and wives are supposed to practice submission, not just wives. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21). Submission is always the free choice of one party to another. Wives choose to submit to their husbands, and husbands choose to submit to their wives.

Christ's relationship with the church is a picture of how a husband and wife should relate: "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:24-27).

Whenever submission issues are raised, the first question that needs to be asked is, What is the nature of the marital relationship? Is the husband's relationship with his wife similar to Christ's relationship with the church? Does she have free choice, or is she a slave "under the law"? Many marital problems arise when a husband tries to keep his wife "under the law," and she feels all the emotions the Bible promises the law will bring: wrath, guilt, insecurity, and alienation (Rom. 4:15; James 2:10; Gal. 5:4).

Freedom is one issue that needs to be examined; grace is another. Is the husband's relationship with his wife full of grace and unconditional love? Is she in a position of "no condemnation" as the church is (Rom. 8:1), or does her husband fail to "wash her" of all guilt? Usually husbands who quote Ephesians 5 turn their wives into slaves and condemn them for not submitting. If she incurs wrath or condemnation for not submitting, she and her husband do not have a grace-filled Christian marriage; they have a marriage "under the law."

Often, in these situations, the husband is trying to get his wife to do something that either is hurtful or takes away her will. Both of these actions are sins against

himself. **"Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church" (Eph. 5:28-29).** Given this, the idea of slave like submission is impossible to hold. Christ never takes away our will or asks us to do something hurtful. He never pushes us past our limits. He never uses us as objects. Christ "gave himself up" for us. He takes care of us as He would His own body.

I have never seen a "submission problem" that did not have a controlling husband at its root. When the wife begins to set clear boundaries, the lack of Christ-likeness in a controlling husband becomes evident because the wife is no longer enabling his immature behavior. She is confronting the truth and setting biblical limits on hurtful behavior. Often, when the wife sets boundaries, the husband begins to grow up.

A Question of Balance

"I can't get him to spend any time with me. All he wants to do is go with his friends to sporting events. He never wants to see me," Cynthia complained.

"What do you say to that?" I asked her husband Paul. "That's not true at all," Paul replied. "It feels like all we have is togetherness. She calls me at work two or three times a day. She is waiting at the door when I get home and wants to talk. She has our evenings and weekends all planned out. It drives me crazy. So, I try to get away and go to a game or to play golf. I feel smothered."

"How often do you try to get out?" "Any time I can.

Probably about two nights a week and one afternoon on the weekend."

"What do you do at those times?" I asked Cynthia.

"Well, I wait for him to come home. I miss him very much."

"Don't you have something you want to do for yourself?"

"No. My family is my life. I live for them. I hate it when they are gone and we can't have time together."

"Well, it's not like you never have time together," I said. "But it is true that you don't have all the time together. And when that happens, Paul seems to be relieved and you are distressed. Can you explain that imbalance?"

"What do you mean, 'imbalance'?" she asked.

"Every marriage is made up of two ingredients, togetherness and separateness. In good marriages, the partners carry equal loads of both of those. Let's say there are 100 points of togetherness and 100 points of separateness. In a good relationship, one partner expresses 50 points of togetherness and 50 points of separateness, and the other does the same. They both do things on their own, and that creates some mutual longing for the other, and the togetherness creates some need for separateness. But in your relationship, you have divided the 200 points differently. You are expressing all of the 100 together points, and he is expressing the 100 points of separateness.

"If you want him to move toward you," I continued, "you need to move away from him and create some space for longing. I don't think Paul ever gets a chance to miss you. You're always pursuing him, and he is turning away to create space. If you would create some space, he would have some space to long for you in, and then he would pursue you." "That's exactly right," Paul broke in. "Honey, it's like when you were getting your graduate degree and were gone so much. Remember? I used to long to see you. I was going nuts without you. I don't get a chance to miss you now. You're always around."

Cynthia was reluctant to concede my point, but eager to explore with Paul ways to bring balance to their marital relationship.

Balance. It's something that God has wired into every system. Every system tries to find balance in any way it can. And many dimensions need to be balanced in a marriage: power, strength, togetherness, sex, and so on. Problems come when, instead of trading places in these areas, one spouse is always powerful and the other powerless; one spouse is always strong and the other weak; one spouse always wants togetherness and the other wants separateness; one spouse always wants sex and the other doesn't. In each case, the couple has struck a balance, but it is not a mutual balance.

Limits help create mutual balance, instead of split balance. They help couples keep each other accountable. If someone does not have boundaries and begins to do another's work for him, such as creating all the togetherness in the relationship, that person is on the road to codependency or worse. The other partner will live out the opposite side of the split. Limits keep

partners accountable through consequences and force the balance to become mutual.

There are balanced polarities in life and relationship. When you find yourself in an unequal relationship, you may lack boundaries. Setting limits may correct the imbalance. For example, when Paul sets boundaries on Cynthia's demands, he forces her to become more independent.

Resolution

It is often easy to see problems, but difficult to make the hard choices and risks that result in change. Let's look at the steps toward personal change in a marital relationship.

1. **Inventory the symptom.** First, you need to recognize the problem and agree to take action to solve it. You will not resolve the problem by wishing. You need to own the problem, whether it be sex, discipline of the children, lack of togetherness, or unfair spending of money.

2. **Identify the specific boundary problem.** One step beyond identifying the symptom is putting your finger on the specific boundary issue. For instance, the symptom may be that one person does not want sex; the boundary problem may be that this person does not say **no** often enough in other areas of the relationship so that this is the one place that she has some power. Or, she may feel as if she does not have enough control in the sexual arena. She may feel powerless; she may feel that her choices are not honored.

3. **Find the origins of the conflict.** This is probably not the first relationship in which this boundary issue has arisen. You probably learned to relate this way in a significant relationship in the family in which you grew up. Certain fears that were developed in that relationship are still operative. You need to name these original issues; **you may need to stop confusing your parent with your spouse.** No other relationship repeats parental conflicts more often than the marriage relationship.

4. **Take in the good.** This step involves establishing a support system. Remember, "Boundaries are not built in a vacuum." We need bonding and support before we build boundaries; the fear of abandonment keeps many people from setting boundaries in the first place.

For this reason, establish a support system that will encourage boundary setting in your marriage. This may be a Co-dependency group, Al-Anon, a marriage counselor, or a pastor. Do not set boundaries alone. You do not set boundaries because you are afraid; the only way is through support. Boundaries are like muscles. They need to be built up in a safe support system and allowed to grow. If you try to shoulder too much weight quickly, your muscles may tear or be pulled. Get help.

5. **Practice.** Practice new boundaries in safe relationships, relationships in which people love you unconditionally. Tell a good friend **no** when you can't do lunch, or let her know when your opinion differs from hers, or give something to her without expecting anything in return. As you practice setting limits with safe people, you will begin to grow in your ability to set limits in your marriage.

6. **Say no to the bad.** Put limits on the bad in; marriage. Stand up to abuse; say no to unreasonable demands. Remember the parable of the talents. There's no growth without risk and a facing up to fear. Being a total success is not as important as stepping out and trying.

7. **Forgive.** To not forgive is to lack boundaries. Unforgiving people allow other people to control them. Setting people who have hurt you free from an old debt is to stop wanting something from them; it sets you free as well. Forgiving can lead to proactive behavior in the present instead of passive wishes from the past.

8. **Become proactive.** Instead of allowing someone else to be in control, figure out what you want to do, set your course and stick to it. Decide what your limits are, what you allow yourself to be a party to, what you will no longer tolerate, and what consequences you will set. Define yourself proactively, and you will be ready to maintain boundaries when the time comes.

9. **Learn to love in freedom and responsibility.** Remember the goal of boundaries: love coming out of freedom is the true self-denial of the New Testament. When you in control of yourself, you can give and sacrifice for love ones in a helpful way instead of giving in to destructive ways of behavior and self-centeredness. This kind of freedom allows one to give in a way that leads to fruit. Remember, "no greater love has anyone than to lay down his life for his friends." This is to live up to the law of Christ, to serve one another. But this must be done out of freedom, not mindless compliance.

Setting and receiving firm limits with your spouse can lead to a much greater intimacy. But you not only need

to address boundaries with your spouse; you need to address setting limits with your children. And it's never too late to start.

Setting Limits With Children

Of all the areas in which boundaries are crucially important, none is more relevant than that of raising children. How we approach boundaries and child rearing will have enormous impact on the characters of our kids. On how they develop values. On how well they do in school. On the friends they pick. On whom they marry. And on how well they do in a career.

God, at His deepest level, is a lover (I John 4:8). He is relationally oriented and relationally driven. He desires connection with us from womb to tomb: "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3). God's loving nature isn't passive. It's active. Love multiplies itself. God the relational Lover is also God the aggressive Creator. He wants to fill up His universe with beings who care for Him and for each other.

The Importance of Family

The family is the social unit God designed to fill up the world with representatives of His loving character. It's a place for nurturing and developing babies until they're mature enough to go out of the family as adults and to multiply His image in other surroundings.

God first picked the nation Israel to be His children. After centuries of resistance by Israel, however, God chose the church: "**Because of [Israel's] transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles**" (Rom. 11:11). The Body of Christ has the same role as Israel had-to multiply God's love and character.

The church is often described as a family. We are to do good "especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). Believers "are members of God's household" (Eph. 2:19). We are to "know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household" (1 Tim. 3:15).

These and many other powerful passages show us how God "thinks family." He explains His heart as a parent would. He's a daddy. He likes His job. This biblical portrayal of God helps show us how parenting is such a vital part of bringing God's own character to this planet in our own little ones.

Limits and Responsibility

God, the good parent, wants to help us, His children, grow up. He wants to see us "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Part of this maturing process is helping us know how to take responsibility for our lives.

It's the same with our own biological kids. Second only to learning how to bond, to form strong attachments, the most important thing parents can give children is a sense of responsibility - knowing what they are responsible for and knowing what they aren't responsible for, knowing how to say **no** and knowing how to accept **no**. Responsibility is a gift of enormous value.

We've all been around middle-aged people who have the boundaries of an eighteen-month-old. They have tantrums or sulk when others set limits on them, or they simply fold and comply with others just to keep the

peace. Remember that these adult people started off as little people. They learned long, long ago to either fear or hate setting limits. The relearning process for adults is laborious.

Instilling vs. Repairing Boundaries

A wise mother of adult children once watched her younger friend struggle with her youngster. The child was refusing to behave, and the young mother was quickly losing her mind. Affirming the mother's decision to make the child sit on a chair by himself, the older woman said, "Do it now, Dear. Discipline the child now-and you just might survive adolescence."

Developing limits in young children is that proverbial ounce of prevention. If we teach responsibility, limit setting, and delay of gratification early on, the smoother our children's later years of life will be. The later we start, the harder we and they have to work.

If you're a parent of older children, don't lose heart. It just means boundary development will be met with more resistance. In their minds, they do not have a lot to gain by learning to set limits. You'll need to spend more time working on it, getting more support from friends and praying harder! We'll review age-appropriate boundary tasks for the different stages of childhood later in this segment.

Boundary Development in Children

The work of setting limits in children is the work of learning responsibility. As we teach them the merits and limits of responsibility, we teach them autonomy-we

prepare them to take on the tasks of adulthood.

The Scriptures have much to say about the role of boundary setting in child rearing. Usually, we call it discipline. The Hebrew and Greek words that scholars translate as "discipline" mean "teaching." This teaching has both positive and a negative slant.

The **positive** facets of discipline are proactivity, prevention, and instruction. Positive discipline is sitting someone down to educate and train him in a task: fathers are to raise children **"in the training and instruction of the Lord"** (Eph 6:4).

Negative discipline is letting children suffer the results of their actions to learn a lesson in responsibility: **"Stern discipline awaits him who leaves the path"** (Prov. 15:10).

Good child rearing involves both preventive training and practice, and correctional consequences. For example, you set a ten o'clock bedtime for your fourteen-year-old. "It's there so that you'll get enough sleep to be alert in school," you tell her. You've just disciplined positively. Then your teen stays out until 11:30 p.m. The next day you say, "Because you did not get to bed on time last night, you may not use the phone today." You've just disciplined negatively. Why are both the carrot and the whip necessary in good boundary development? Because God uses practice-trial and error-to help us grow up. We learn maturity by getting information, applying it poorly, making mistakes, learning from our mistakes, and doing better the next time. Ultimately, the best way to discipline is to use the meditation process and ask God for His insight. (2B)

Practice is necessary in all areas of life: in learning to ski, write an essay, or operate a computer. We need practice in developing a deep love relationship and in learning to study the Bible. And it's just as true in our spiritual and emotional growth: **"But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Heb. 5:14)**. Practice is important in learning boundaries and responsibility. Our mistakes are our teachers.

Discipline is an **external** boundary, designed to develop **internal** boundaries in our children. It provides a structure of safety until the child has enough structure in his character to not need it. Good discipline always moves the child toward more internal structure and more responsibility.

We need to distinguish between discipline and punishment. Punishment is payment for wrongdoing. Legally, it's paying a penalty for breaking the law. Punishment doesn't leave a lot of room for practice, however. It's not a great teacher. The price is too high: **"The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23)**, and **"whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10)**. Punishment does not leave much room for mistakes.

Discipline, however, is different. Discipline is not payment for a wrong. It's the natural law of God: our actions reap consequences.

Discipline is different from punishment because God is finished punishing us. Punishment ended on the cross for all those who accept Christ as Savior: **"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24)**. Christ's suffering paid for our wrongdoing.

In addition, discipline and punishment have a different relationship to time. **Punishment looks back.** It focuses on making payment for wrongs done in the past. Christ's suffering was payment, for example, for our sin. **Discipline, however, looks forward.** The lessons we learn from discipline help us to not make the same mistakes again: **"God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness" (Heb. 12:10).**

How does that help us? It frees us to make mistakes without fear of judgment, without fear of loss of relationship: **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).** The freedom of the cross allows us to practice without having to pay a terrible price. The only danger is consequences—not isolation and judgment

Take, for example, the mother who tells her ten-year-old, "You smart off again, and I won't love you anymore." The youngster is immediately in a no-win situation. The child can either rebel and lose the most important relationship in her life, or she can comply and become externally obedient, losing any chance of practicing confrontational skills. Those skills that are necessary, when a stranger asked her to get into his car or touches her inappropriately. Now, compare that response with this, "I'll never stop loving you. That's a constant in my heart. However, if you smart off again you've lost your boom box for three days." The relationship is still intact. There's no condemnation. And the child gets an opportunity to choose responsibility or suffer consequences-with no risk of losing love and safety.

What specific needs do boundaries meet in our kids? Limit-setting abilities have several important jobs that will pay enormous dividends throughout life.

Self-Protection

Have you ever seen anything more helpless than the human infant? Human babies are less able to take care of themselves than animal babies. God designed the newborn months as a means for the mother and father (or another caregiver) to connect deeply with their infant, knowing that without their minute-by-minute care, the baby would not survive. All this time and energy translates into an enduring attachment, in which the child learns to feel safe in the world.

God's program of maturation, however, doesn't stop there. Mom and Dad can't always be there to care and provide. The task of protection needs to ultimately pass on to the children. When they grow up, they need to protect themselves.

Setting Limits are our way of protecting and safeguarding our souls. Boundaries are designed to keep the good in and the bad out. And skills such as saying **no**, telling the truth, and maintaining physical distance need to be developed in the family structure to allow the child to take on the responsibility of self-protection.

Imagine the following—two twelve-year-old boys: Jimmy is talking with his parents at the dinner table. "Guess what—some kids wanted me to smoke pot with them. When I told them I didn't want to, they said I was a sissy. I told them they were dumb. I like some of them, but if they can't like me because I don't smoke pot, I guess they aren't really my friends."

Paul, on the other hand, comes home after school with red eyes, slurred speech, and coordination difficulties.

When asked by his concerned parents what is wrong, he denies everything until, finally, he blurts out, "Everybody's doing it. They all smoke pot! Why do you single out my friends and hate them?"

Both Jimmy and Paul come from Christian homes with lots of love and an adherence to biblical values. Why did they turn out so differently? Jimmy's family allowed disagreements between parent and child and gave him practice in the skill of setting limits, even with them. Jimmy's mom would be holding and hugging her two-year-old when he would get fidgety. He'd say, "Down," meaning, "Let me get a little breathing space, Ma." Fighting her own impulses to hold on to her child, she would set him down on the floor and say, "Wanna play with your trucks?"

Jimmy's dad used the same philosophy. When wrestling with his son on the floor, he tried to pay attention to Jimmy's limits. When the going got too rough, or when Jimmy was tired, he could say, "Stop, Daddy," and Dad would get up. They'd go to another game.

Jimmy was receiving boundary training. He was learning that when he was scared, in discomfort, or wanted to change things, he could say no. This little word gave him a sense of power in his life. It took him out of a helpless or compliant position. And Jimmy could say it without receiving an angry and hurt response, or a manipulative countermove, such as, "But Jimmy, Mommy needs to hold you now, okay?"

Jimmy learned from infancy on that his boundaries were good and that he could use them to protect himself. He learned to resist things that weren't good for him.

A trademark of Jimmy's family was permission to disagree. When, for example, Jimmy would fight his parents about his bedtime, they never withdrew or punished him for disagreeing. Instead, they would listen to his reasoning, and, if it seemed appropriate, they would change their minds. If not, they would maintain their boundaries.

Jimmy was also given a vote in some family matters. When family night out would come up, his parents listened to his opinion on whether they should go to a movie, play board games, or play basketball. Was this a family with no limits? On the contrary! It was a family who took boundary setting seriously—as a skill to develop in its children.

This was good practice for resisting in the evil day (Eph. 5:16), when some of Jimmy's friends turned on him and pressured him to take drugs. How was Jimmy able to refuse?

Because by then, he'd had ten or eleven years of practice disagreeing with people who were important to him without losing their love. He didn't fear abandonment in standing up against his friends. He'd done it many times successfully with his family with no loss of love.

Paul, on the other hand, came from a different family setting. In his home, no had two different responses. His mom would be hurt and withdraw and pout. She would send guilt messages, such as "How can you say no to your mom who loves you?" His dad would get angry, threaten him, and say things like, "Don't talk back to me, Mister."

It didn't take long for Paul to learn that to have his way; he had to be externally compliant. He developed a strong yes on the outside, seeming to agree with his family's values and control. Whatever he thought about a subject-the dinner menu, TV restrictions, church choices, clothes, or curfews-he stuffed inside.

Once, when he had tried to resist his mother's hug, she had immediately withdrawn from him, pushing him away with the words, "Someday you'll feel sorry for hurting your mother's feelings like that." Day by day, Paul was being trained to not set limits.

As a result of his learned not to set limits, Paul seemed to be a content, respectful son. The teens, however, are a crucible for kids. We find out what kind of character has actually been built into our children during this difficult passage.

Paul folded. He gave in to his friends' pressure. Is it any wonder that the first people he said no to were his parents-at twelve years old? Resentment and the years of not having boundaries were beginning to erode the compliant, easy-to-live-with false self he'd developed to survive.

Taking Responsibility for One's Needs

Our limits create a spiritual and emotional space, a separateness, between ourselves and others. This allows our needs to be heard and understood. Without a solid sense of boundaries, it becomes difficult to filter out our needs from those of others. There is too much static in the relationship.

When children can be taught to experience their own needs, as opposed to those of others, they have been given a genuine advantage in life. They are able to better avoid the burnout that comes from not taking care of one's self.

How can we help our children experience their own individual needs? The best thing a parent can do is to encourage verbal expression of those needs, even when they don't "go with the family flow." When children have permission to ask for something that goes against the grain— even though they might not receive it—they develop a sense of what they need.

Below are some ways you can help your children:

- ◆ **Allow them to talk about their anger.**
- ◆ **Allow them to express grief, loss, or sadness without trying to cheer them up and talk them out of their feelings.**
- ◆ **Encourage them to ask questions and not assume your words are the equivalent of Scripture (this takes a pretty secure parent!).**
- ◆ **Ask them what they are feeling when they seem isolated or distressed; help them put words to their negative feelings. Do not try to keep things light for a false sense of cooperation and family closeness. Their feelings are real and deep; allow them to express those emotions.**

The first aspect of taking ownership over one's needs, then, is to identify them. That's where our spiritual radar comes in.

The second aspect of taking ownership is to initiate responsible caretaking for ourselves-as opposed to placing the burden on someone else. We must allow our children to experience the painful consequences of their irresponsible acts.

Whose Homework is This?

It's important to tie consequences as closely to the actions of the child as possible. This best replicates real life. Homework projects are another area in which parents can either help the child take on responsibility—or create the illusion of the eternal, omnipresent parent who will always take up the slack. It's difficult when your child comes to you tearfully, saying, "I have a ten-page report due tomorrow- and I just started." Our impulse, as loving parents, is to bail them out by doing the research, or the organization, or the typing. Or all three.

Why do we do this? Because we love our children. We long for the best for them just as God longs for the best for us. And yet, just as God allows us to experience our failures, we may need to let our kids mar a good report card with a bad grade. This is often the consequence of not planning ahead.

Children need to have a sense of control and choice in their lives. They need to see themselves not as the dependent, helpless pawns of parents, but as choosing, willing, initiative-taking agents of their own lives.

Children begin life in a helpless, dependent fashion. Godly parenting, however, seeks to help children learn to think, make decisions, and master their environment in all aspects of life. This runs the gamut of deciding what to wear in the morning to what courses to take in school. Learning to make **age-appropriate decisions** helps children have a sense of security and control in their lives.

Anxious and well-meaning parents attempt to prevent their children from making painful decisions. They shield them from fouling up and skinning their knees. Their motto is, "Here, let me decide that for you." The result is that kids become atrophied in a very important part of the image of God that should be developing in their character: their assertion, or change-making abilities. Children need a sense that their lives, their destinies are largely theirs to determine, within the province of God's sovereignty. This helps them weigh choices, rather than avoid them. They learn to appreciate the consequences of choices made, rather than resenting the choices made for them.

Delaying Gratification

The word **now** was made for young children. It's where they live. Try telling a two-year-old she can have dessert tomorrow. She doesn't buy it. That means "never" to her. Newborns, in fact, don't have the capacity to understand "later." That's why a six-month-old panics when Mom leaves the room. He is convinced that she is irrevocably gone forever.

Yet, sometime in our development we learn the value of "later," of delaying one good for a greater good. We call

this skill delay of gratification. It's the ability to say **no to our impulses, wishes, and desires for some gain down the road.**

The Scriptures place great value on this ability. God uses this skill to help us see the benefits of planning and preparing. Jesus is our prime example, "Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

Generally, this skill isn't relevant until after the first year of life, as bonding needs take precedence during that time. However, teaching delay of gratification can begin quickly by the beginning of the second year. Dessert comes after carrots, not before.

Older children also need to learn this skill. The family can't buy certain clothes or recreational items until later in the year. Again, the boundaries developed during this process are invaluable later in life. They can prevent a child from becoming an adult who is a broken, chaotic, impulse-driven slave to Madison Avenue. Our children can become like ants, who are self-sufficient, instead of sluggards, who are always in crisis (Prov. 6:6-11).

Learning how to delay gratification helps children have a goal orientation. They learn to save time and money for things that are important to them, and they value what they have chosen to buy. One family I know had the son save up his money for his first car. He began with a plan, with Dad's help, when he was thirteen. When all his weekend and summer jobs finally paid off in a car when he was sixteen, he treated that car like it was fine china—you could eat lunch off the hood. He had

counted the cost, and valued the result (Luke 14:28).

Respecting the Limits of Others

From an early age, children need to be able to accept the limits of parents, siblings, and friends. They need to know that others don't always want to play with them, that others may not want to watch the same TV shows they want, and that others may want to eat dinner at a different restaurant than they do. They need to know that the world doesn't revolve around them.

This is important for a couple of reasons. First, the ability to learn to accept limits teaches us to take responsibility for ourselves.

Knowing that others are not always available for us, at our beck and call, helps us to become inwardly directed instead of externally driven. It helps us carry our own knapsack.

Have you ever been around a child who can't hear **no**, who keeps whining, cajoling, throwing a tantrum, or pouting till he gets his way? The problem is, the longer we hate and resist the limits of others, the more dependent we will be on others. We expect others to take care of us, rather than simply taking care of ourselves.

At any rate, God has constructed life itself to teach us this law. It's the only way we can live on this planet together. Sooner or later, someone will say a **no** to us that we can't ignore. It's built into the fabric of life. Observe the progression of no(s) in the life of the person who resists others' limits:

1. The noof parents
2. The noof siblings
3. The noof schoolteachers
4. The noof school friends
5. The noof bosses and supervisors
6. The noof spouses
7. The no of police and other authorities

Some people learn to accept boundaries early in life, even as early as stage number one. But some people have to go all the way to number seven before they get the picture that we have to accept life's limits: **"Stop listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge" (Prov. 19:27)**. Many out-of-control adolescents don't mature until their thirties, when they become tired of not having a steady job and a place to stay. They have to hit bottom financially, and sometimes they may even have to live on the streets for a while. In time, they begin sticking with a career, saving money, and starting to grow up. They gradually begin to accept life's limits.

No matter how tough we think we are, there's always someone tougher. If we don't teach our children to take a **no**, someone who loves them far less may take on the job. Someone tougher. Someone stronger. And most parents would much rather spare having their children go through this suffering. The earlier we teach limits, the better.

A second, even more important, reason why accepting the limits of others is important for kids is this: Heeding others' boundaries helps children to love. At its heart, the idea of respecting others' boundaries is the basis for empathy, or loving others as we'd like to be loved.

Children need to be given the grace of having their **no** respected, and they need to learn to give that same grace to others. As they feel empathy for the needs of others, they mature and deepen in their love for God and others: **"We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).**

Say, for example, that your six-year-old accidentally but carelessly hits you on the head hard with a softball. To ignore it, or act like it didn't hurt, is to give the child the feeling that his actions have no impact. He can then avoid any sense of responsibility or awareness of others' needs or hurts. However, telling him, "I know you didn't do it on purpose, but that ball really hurt me-try to be a little more careful" helps him see, without condemnation, that he can hurt people he loves and that his actions do matter.

If this principle isn't taught, it's difficult for children to grow up as loving people. Frequently, they become self-centered or controlling. At that point, God's program of maturity is more difficult.

Age Appropriate Limits

If this was the first area you turned to when you glanced over the table of contents, chances are you're a parent. Chances are also that you may be experiencing boundary difficulties with your children. Perhaps you're reading this simply in an effort to prevent problems. But more likely you're in some pain from which you need relief: Your newborn won't stop shrieking. Your toddler runs the household. Your elementary school student has behavioral problems at school. Your junior high kid smarts off. Your high schooler is drinking.

All of these issues indicate possible boundary problems. And this section provides an outline on the age-appropriate boundary tasks your children should be learning. As parents, you need to take into consideration your children's developmental needs and abilities to avoid asking them to do something they can't do, or to avoid asking too little of them.

Below are the basic tasks for the different stages of childhood.

Birth to Five Months

At this stage, the newborn needs to establish an attachment with Mother, Dad, or the primary caregiver. A sense of belonging, of being safe and welcome are the tasks the child needs to accomplish. Setting limits is not as much an issue here as providing security for the infant.

The only real boundary here is the soothing presence of the mother. She protects the infant. Mom's job is to help her newborn contain intense, frightening, and conflicting feelings. Left by themselves, infants are terrorized by their aloneness and lack of internal structure.

For centuries mothers-including Mary, Jesus' mother-have swaddled their babies, or wrapped cloths tightly around them. While swaddling keeps the baby's body heat regulated, the tight wrappings also help the infant feel safe-a sort of external boundary. The baby knows where he or she begins and ends. When newborns are undressed, they often panic about the loss of structure around them.

Some well-meaning Christian teachers call for infant training theories that schedule the feeding and holding of infants. These techniques try to teach an infant not to cry or demand comfort because "the child is in control instead of the parent," or because "that demand is evidence of the child's selfish, sinful nature." These theories can be horribly destructive when not understood biblically or developmentally.

The screaming four-month-old child is trying to find out whether the world is a reasonably safe place or not. They are in a state of deep terror and isolation. They haven't learned to feel comfort when no one is around. To put them on the parents' schedule instead of their own for holding and feeding is to "condemn the innocent," as Jesus said (Matt. 12:7).

These teachers say their programs are biblical because they work. "When I stopped picking him up from the crib at night, my two-month-old stopped crying," they'll say. That may be true. But another explanation for the cessation of crying is infant depression, a condition in which the child gives up hope and withdraws. **"Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12).**

Teaching delay of gratification shouldn't begin until after the first year of life, when a foundation of safety has been established between baby and mother. Just as grace always precedes truth (John 1:17), attachment must come before separation.

Five to Ten Months

Children in the last half of the first year of life are in the "hatching" phase. They are learning that "Mother and I

aren't the same." There's a scary, fascinating world out there that babies literally crawl toward. Though they have tremendous dependency needs, infants are beginning to move out of their oneness with their mom.

To help their children develop good boundaries during this stage, parents need to encourage attempts at separate-ness, while still being the anchors the child clings to. Allow your child to be fascinated with people and objects other than you. Make your home a safe place for your baby to explore.

Helping your children hatch, however, doesn't mean neglecting the deep attachment necessary for their internal foundation, their rootedness and groundedness. This is still an infant's primary work. You need to carefully tend to your child's needs for bonding and emotional safety, while at the same time allowing the child to look outward, beyond you.

Many mothers find this transition from their child's love affair with them to the big wide world difficult. The loss of such a deep intimacy is great, especially after the time spent in pregnancy and childbirth. The responsible mother, however, will strive to get her own closeness needs met by other adults in her life. She will encourage the "hatching" of her baby, knowing she is preparing him or her to be equipped to "leave and cleave."

At this point, most infants don't yet have that ability to understand and respond appropriately to the word **no**. Keeping them out of danger by picking them up and removing them from unsafe places is the best route.

Ten to Eighteen Months

At this "practicing" stage, your baby begins not only talking, but also walking and the possibilities stretch out before them. The world is this child's oyster and they spend a lot of time finding ways to open it up and play with it. Now they have the emotional and cognitive ability to understand and respond to the word **no**.

Setting limits become increasingly important during this stage, both having and hearing limits. Allowing the **no** muscle to begin developing is crucial at this age. **No** is your child's way of finding out whether taking responsibility for their life has good results or whether **no** causes someone to withdraw. As parents, learn to rejoice in your baby's **no**.

At the same time, you have the delicate task of helping your child see that she is not the center of the universe. There are limits in life. There are consequences for scribbling on doors and screaming in church. Yet you need to do this without quenching the sense of excitement and interest in the world that she has been developing.

Eighteen to Thirty-six Months

The child is now learning the important task of taking responsibility for a separate yet connected soul. The practicing child gives way to the more sober child who is realizing that life has limits, but that being separate does not mean that we can't be attached. In this phase, the following abilities are goals:

1. The ability to be emotionally attached to others, without giving up a sense of self and one's freedom to be apart.

2. The ability to say appropriate no(s) to others without the loss of love.

3. The ability to take appropriate no(s) from others without withdrawing emotionally.

At eighteen to thirty-six months the child needs to learn to be autonomous. They want to be free of parental rule, but this desire is conflicted by their deep dependence on their parents. The wise parent will help them gain a sense of individualism and accept their loss of omnipotence, but without losing attachment.

To teach a child to set limits at this stage, you need to respect their no(s) whenever appropriate, yet maintain your own firm no. It's easy for you to try to win all the skirmishes. But there are simply too many. You will end up losing the war because you've lost the big picture the attachment. Don't waste your energy trying to control a random whirlwind. Pick your battles carefully and choose the important ones to win.

Wise parents will rejoice in children's fun times, but will consistently and uniformly keep solid limits with the practicing child. At this age, children can learn the rules of the house as well as the consequences for breaking them. One workable process of discipline is listed below:

1. **First infraction.** Tell the child not to color on the bedsheet. Try to help the child meet their need in

another way - using a coloring book or a pad of plain paper to crayon on instead of a bedsheet, for example.

2. **Second infraction.** Again, tell the child no, and state the consequence. They will need to take a time out for one minute or lose the crayons for the rest of the day.

3. **Third infraction.** Administer the consequences, explaining why, then give the child a few minutes to be angry and separate from parents.

4. **Comfort and reconnection.** Hold and comfort the child, helping them reattach with you. This helps them differentiate between consequences and a loss of love. Painful consequences should never include a loss of connection.

Three to Five Years

During this phase, children move into a period of sexual role development. The child identifies with the same parent. Little boys want to be like Dad, and little girls like Mom. They also develop competitive feelings toward that same parent, wishing to marry the opposite-sex parent, defeating the same-sex parent in the process. They are preparing for adult sex roles later in life.

Setting limits by parents is important here. Gently but firmly, mothers need to allow their daughters to identify and to compete. They must also deal with the possessiveness of their sons, letting them know that "I know you'd like to marry Mom, but Mom's married to Dad." Fathers have to do the same job with their sons and daughters. This helps children learn to identify with the opposite-sex parent and take on appropriate characteristics.

Parents who fear the budding sexuality of their children will often become critical of these intense longings. Their own fear may cause them to attack or to shame their child, causing them to repress their sexuality. At the other extreme, the needy parent will sometimes emotionally, or even physically, seduce the child of the opposite sex. The mother who tells her son that "Daddy doesn't understand me - you're the only one who can" is ensuring years of confusion about sex roles for her son. Mature parents need to keep a distinction between allowing sex role typing to emerge and keeping the lines between parent and child clear.

Six to Eleven Years

During what is called latency, or the years of industry, the child is preparing for the upcoming thrust into adolescence. These years are the last true years of childhood. They are important for learning task orientation through school-work and play, and for learning to connect with same-sex peers.

An extremely busy time for work and friends, this period presents its own limit setting tasks for parents. Here, you need to help your kids establish the fundamentals of tasks: doing homework, house chores, and projects. They need to learn planning and the discipline of keeping at a job until it's finished. They need to learn such things as delay of gratification, goal setting, and budgeting time.

Eleven to Eighteen Years

Adolescence, the final step before adulthood, involves important tasks such as sexual maturation, a sense of

solidifying identity in any surrounding, career leanings, and love choices. It can be a frightening yet exciting time for both child and parents.

By this point, the "de-parenting" process should have begun. Things are beginning to shift between you and your youngster. Instead of controlling your child, you influence. You increase their freedom, as well as responsibility. You renegotiate restrictions, limits, and consequences with more flexibility.

All of these changes are like the countdown of a NASA space shuttle. You are preparing for the launching of a young adult into the world. Wise parents keep the imminent catapulting of their teens into society in the back of their minds at all times. The question they must always struggle with is no longer, "How can I make them behave?" but rather, "How can I help them survive on their own?"

Teens need to be setting their own scheduling, values, and money use, that is, as much as possible. And they should suffer real-life consequences when they miss the mark. The seventeen-year-old who is still disciplined with TV and phone restrictions may have real problems at college in one year. Professors, deans, and residence hall assistants don't impose these kinds of restrictions; they resort to tactics such as failing grades, suspension, and expulsion.

If you are the parent of a teen who hasn't had training in setting limits, you may feel at a loss about what to do. You need to begin at whatever point your teens are. When their ability to say and hear **no is deficient, clarifying house rules and consequences can often help**

in the last few years before the youth leaves home.

Symptoms such as the following, however, may indicate a more serious problem:

- Isolation from family members
- Depressed mood
- Rebellious behavior
- Continual conflict in family
- Wrong type of friends
- School problems
- Eating disorders
- Alcohol use
- Drug use
- Suicidal ideas or behavior

Many parents, observing these problems, react with either too many limits, or too few. The too-strict parent runs the risk of alienating the almost-adult from the home connection. The too-lenient parent wants to be the child's best friend at a time the teen needs someone to respect. At this point, parents need a great deal of Godly direction and should also consider consulting a pastor or counselor who understands teen issues. The stakes are simply too high to ignore professional help.

Types of Discipline

Many parents are confused by how to teach children to respect boundaries. They read countless books and articles on spanking, time-outs, restrictions, and allowances. While this question is beyond the scope of this message, a few thoughts may help organize the searching parent.

1. Consequences are intended to increase the child's sense of responsibility and control over his life. Discipline that increases the child's sense of helplessness isn't helpful. Dragging a sixteen-year-old girl to class doesn't build the internal motivation she'll need in two years when she's in college. A system of rewards and consequences that help her choose school for her own benefit has much better possibilities for success.

2. Consequences must be age-appropriate. You need to think through the meaning of your discipline. Spanking, for example, humiliates and angers a teenager; however, administered correctly, it can help build structure for a four-year-old.

3. You must be able to distinguish between minor and severe infractions. Otherwise, severe penalties become meaningless.

A youngster once told me, "I got whippings for little things and for big things. So I started getting more involved in big things. It just seemed more efficient." Once you've been sentenced to death, you don't have much to gain by being good!

4. The goal of setting limits is an internal sense of motivation, with self-induced consequences. Successful parenting means that our kids want to get out of bed and go to school, be responsible, be empathic, and be caring because that's important to them, not because it's important to us. It's only when love and limits are a genuine part of the child's character that true maturity can occur. Otherwise, we are raising compliant parrots who will, in time, self-destruct.

Parents have a sober responsibility: teaching their children to have an internal sense of limits and to respect the limits of others. It's sober because the Bible says it's sober: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1).

There are certainly no guarantees that our training will be heeded. Children have the responsibility to listen and learn. The older they are, the more responsibility they have. Yet as we learn about our own boundary issues, take responsibility for them, and grow up ourselves, we increase our kids' chances to learn boundaries in an adult world in which these abilities will be sorely needed-every day of their lives.

Setting Limits On Yourself

In this message, instead of looking at the control and manipulation of others, we'll be looking at our responsibility to control our own bodies (I Thess. 4:4). Instead of examining outer boundary conflicts with other people, we will be looking at our own internal boundary conflicts. This can get a little touchy. As the disgruntled country church member told his pastor as he left after the Sunday sermon, "You done stopped preachin', and you done started meddlin."

Instead of this defensive posture, we are much better off to look humbly at ourselves. To ask for feedback from others. To listen to people we trust. And to confess, "I was wrong."

Our Out-of-Control Soul

Eating:

In counseling a friend of mind last year, she found her secret shame was becoming more difficult to keep a secret. Her five-foot-four frame could hide a little extra weight, but over the past few months she'd gradually moved into the mid-hundred mark. She hated it. Her dating life, her stamina, and her attitude toward herself were all affected.

She was out of control. In her successful but stressful career as an attorney, cookies and candy were the only place she could go when everything was falling down around her. Twelve-hour days meant lots of isolation, and absolutely nothing filled the void like fatty foods. No wonder they call it comfort food, she would think.

What makes overeating especially painful is that overweight is visible to others. The overweight person feels enormous self-hate and shame about their condition. And, like others who suffer from out-of-control behaviors, the overweight person feels overwhelming shame for their behavior, which drives them away from relationships and back to food.

Both chronic and bingeing overeaters suffer from an internal problem. For overeaters, food serves as a false way of setting limits. They might use food to avoid intimacy by gaining weight and becoming less attractive. Or they might binge as a way to get false closeness. For bingers, the "comfort" from food is less scary than the prospect of real relationships, where setting real limits would be necessary.

Money:

A now-famous bumper sticker reads, "I can't be overdrawn - I still have checks left!" People have tremendous problems in many different areas dealing with money, including the following:

- impulse spending
- careless budgeting
- living beyond one's means
- credit problems
- chronically borrowing from friends
- ineffectual savings plans
- working more to pay all the bills
- enabling others

God intended for money to be a blessing to us and others: "**Give, and it will be given to you**" (Luke 6:38). In

fact, the Bible says that the problem isn't money, it's the love of money that is "a root of all kinds of evil" (I Tim. 6:10).

Most of us would certainly agree that we need to be in control of our finances. Saving money, keeping costs down, and shopping for discounts are all good things. It's tempting to see money problems as simply a need for more income; however, the problem often isn't the high cost of living-it's the cost of high living.

The problem of our financial outgo exceeding our input is a self-control issue. When we have difficulty saying **no** to spending more than we should, we run the risk of becoming someone else's servant: "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7).

Time:

Many people feel that their time is out of control. They are "eleventh-hour people," constantly on the edge of deadlines. Try as they might, they find the day-every day-getting away from them. There just aren't enough hours to accomplish their tasks. The word early doesn't seem to be part of their personal experience. Some of the time binds these strugglers deal with are these:

- **business meetings**
- **luncheon appointments**
- **project deadlines**

These people breeze into meetings fifteen minutes late and breathlessly apologize, talking about traffic, overwhelming job responsibilities, or kid emergencies.

People whose time is out of control inconvenience others, whether they mean to or not. The problem often stems from one or more of the following causes:

1. Omnipotence. These people have unrealistic, somewhat grandiose expectations of what they can accomplish in a given amount of time. "No problem-I'll do it" is their motto.

2. Over responsibility for the feelings of others. They think that leaving a party too early will cause the host to feel abandoned.

3. Lack of realistic anxiety. They live so much in the present that they neglect to plan ahead for traffic, parking the car, or dressing for an outing.

4. Rationalization. They minimize the distress and inconvenience that others must put up with because of their lateness. They think, "They're my friends-they'll understand."

The person with undeveloped time expectations ends up frustrating not only others, but himself. He ends the day without the sense that a **"desire realized is sweet to the soul" (Prov. 13:19)**. Instead, he is left with unrealized desires, half-baked projects, and the realization that tomorrow will begin with him running behind schedule.

Task Completion:

A first cousin to the time problem, task completion deals with "finishing well." Most of us have goals in the love and work areas of life. We may wish to be a veterinarian or a lawyer. We may wish to own our own business or

own a home in the country. We may wish to start a Bible study program or an exercise regimen.

We all would like to say about our tasks, whether large or small, what Paul said: **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness" (II Tim. 4:7-8)**. More eloquent in their simplicity are Jesus' words on the cross: **"It is finished" (John 19:30)**.

Though they may be great starters, many Christians find themselves unable to be good finishers. For one reason or another, creative ideas don't pan out. A regular schedule of operations becomes bogged down. Success looms, then is suddenly snatched away.

The problem with many poor finishers lies in one of the following causes:

1. **Resistance to structure.** Poor finishers feel that submitting to the discipline of a plan is a putdown.
2. **Fear of success.** Poor finishers are overconcerned that success will cause others to envy and criticize them. Better to shoot themselves in the foot than to lose their friends.
3. **Lack of follow-through.** Poor finishers have an aversion to the boring "nuts and bolts" of turning the crank on a project. They are much more excited about birthing the idea, then turning it over to other people to execute it.
4. **Distractibility.** Poor finishers are unable to focus on a project until it's done. They have often never developed competent concentration skills.
5. **Inability to delay gratification.** Poor finishers are

unable to work through the pain of a project to experience the satisfaction of a job well done. They want to go directly to the pleasure.

6. **Inability to say no to other pressures.** Poor finishers are unable to say **no** to other people and projects. They don't have time to finish any job well.

Those with task completion problems often feel like two-year-olds in their favorite toy area. They'll bang a hammer for a bit, play with a toy car, talk to a puppet, and then pick up a book. All in two minutes or less. It's easy to see the issues inherent in those with task completion problems. Their internal **no** hasn't been developed enough to keep them focused on finishing things.

Tongue:

Have you ever been to meetings where one individual always dominate the conversation. They go off on tangents, change the subject, and spend inordinate amounts of time on irrelevant details. They don't seem to get to the point. Other members are spacing out, dozing off, or becoming restless. You just want to say to that individual, "Talk net, will ya?" or "Bottom line please."

"Talking net," putting a net on their words can be a struggle for many. How we use language can deeply affect the quality of our relationships. The tongue can be a source of both blessing and curse (James 3:9-10). It can be a blessing when we use our tongue to empathize, identify, encourage, confront, and exhort others. It can be a curse when we use it to put others down.

Many people who have difficulty setting verbal boundaries on themselves aren't really aware of their problem. They are often genuinely surprised when a friend says to them, "Sometimes it seems like you interpret my commas as periods."

I knew a woman who was desperately afraid that others would get to know her. She asked questions and talked quickly so that no one could turn the conversation toward her. She had only one problem: she had to take breaths to continue talking, and the breath created a space for someone else to say something. The woman resolved her problem, however, in an ingenious way; she drew her breaths in the middle of her sentences, rather than at the end. That kept people sufficiently off-balance so that she was rarely interrupted. An effective strategy, with only one problem: she had to keep finding new people to talk to. After a few rounds with her, people disappeared.

"When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise" (Prov. 10:19). "A man of knowledge uses words with restraint" (Prov. 17:27). According to The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "restrain" refers to "the free action of holding back something or someone. The actor has the power over the object." We have the power to set limits on what comes out of our mouths.

When we can't hold back, or set limits, on what comes from our lips, our words are in charge—not us. But we are still responsible for those words. Our words do not come from somewhere outside of us, as if we were a ventriloquist's dummy. They are the product of our hearts. Our saying, "I didn't mean that," is probably

better translated, "I didn't want you to know I thought that about you." We need to take responsibility for our words. **"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken" (Matt. 12:36)**

Sexuality:

As Christians are finding more safe places in the church to be honest about spiritual and emotional conflicts, sexual problems have emerged as a major issue. Such problems include compulsive masturbation, compulsive heterosexual or homosexual relationships, pornography, prostitution, exhibitionism, voyeurism, obscene phone calls, indecent liberties, child molestation, incest, and rape.

The individual caught up in an out-of-control sexual behavior generally feels deeply isolated and shameful. This keeps what is broken in the soul sequestered in the darkness-out of the light of relationship with God and others, where there can be neither help nor resolution. His or her sexuality takes on a life of its own, unreal and fantasy-driven. One man described it as a "not-me experience." It was, for him, as if the real him was watching his sexual actions from across the room. Others may feel so dead and detached that sexuality is the only way they feel alive.

The problem, however, is that, as in most internal conflicts, sexual perversion becomes a tyrant, demanding and insatiable. No matter how many orgasms are reached, the desire only deepens an inability to say **no** to one's lusts drives. Launching them into deep despair and hopelessness.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse:

Probably the clearest examples of lack of internal limits are alcohol and drug dependencies. They create an insatiable drive in the lives of addicts. Divorce, job loss, financial medical problems, and death are the fruits of the failure to set limits in these areas.

Most tragic are the increasingly younger child is experimenting with drugs. Drug addiction is difficult in adults, who have some semblance of character and limits; for the child, whose boundaries are delicately forming, the results are often lifelong and debilitating.

Why Doesn't My "No" Work?

As you read about the out-of-control areas above, you may have felt defeated and frustrated with yourself. You probably could identify with one or more of the problem areas, and you probably are no stranger to the discouragement of not having mature limits in these internal areas. What's the problem? Why doesn't our **no** work on ourselves?

There are at least three reasons for this:

1. We are our own worst enemies. An external problem is easier to deal with than an internal one. When we switch our focus from setting limits on other people to setting limits on ourselves, we make a major shift in responsibility. Previously, we were only responsible **to**, not **for**, the other party. Now we have a great deal more involvement—we are the other party. We are responsible for ourselves.

When you are around a critical person, the kind who finds fault with everything, you can set limits on your exposure to this person's constant criticism. You can change subjects, rooms, houses, or continents. You can leave. But what if this critical person is in your own head? What if you are the person with the problem? What if you have met the enemy and he is you?

2. We withdraw from relationship when we most need it. Recently I received a prayer request from the website from a young lady with an eating disorder. She was thirty years old, and she had been bingeing since she was a teenager. The Lord moved upon my heart to call her. During our first conversation, I asked her about her previous attempts to solve this internal problem.

"I try to work out and eat right," she said. "But I always fall back."

"Who do you talk to about this?" I asked.

"What do you mean?" She replied.

"Who do you tell about your eating problem when you can't take it anymore?"

"You're asking too much. This is a private problem. Can't I do this without anyone knowing?"

Since the Fall, our instincts have been to withdraw from relationship when we're in trouble, when we most need other people. (Remember how Adam and Eve hid from God after they ate the forbidden fruit?) Due to our lack of security, our loss of grace, our shame, and our pride, we turn inward, rather than outward, when we're in

trouble. And that's a problem. As **Ecclesiastes** puts it: "Woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help" (4:10).

Such withdrawal happens all the time. But when hurting people begin to make attachments to me and others; for the first time, they begin coming forth with their need for connection. Like a rose lifting its petals after a hard rain, they begin to relate and connect in the light of the grace of God and His people. Inevitably an unexpected difficulty will occur. Sometimes their depression will temporarily worsen as their pain inside is exposed. Sometimes traumatic memories will surface. Sometimes severe conflict will occur with family members. Instead of bringing these painful and frightening feelings to God or the Body of Christ, these people will often retreat to work out the problem. They'll spend days doing everything possible to get back under control. They'll talk positively to themselves or read Scriptures compulsively to try to make themselves "feel better."

It is only when this attempt at a solution breaks down that they finally realize that these spiritual pains and burdens need to be brought out of themselves to the **Body of Christ**. To the isolated person, nothing feels more frightening, unsafe, or unwise. Such a person needs to feel very secure before they will risk taking their spiritual and emotional problems to other people.

And yet the Bible doesn't recognize any other answer to these problems. Grace must come from inside and outside of ourselves to be useful and healing. Just as the branch withers without the vine (John 15:1-6), we can sustain neither life nor emotional repair without bonding to God and others. God and His people are the

fuel, the energy source from which any problem is addressed. We need to be "joined and held together by every supporting ligament" (Eph. 4:16) of the Body of Christ to heal and to grow up.

Whether our limits issue is food, substances, sex, time, projects, the tongue, or money, we can't solve it in a vacuum. If we could, we would. But the more we isolate ourselves, the harder our struggle becomes. Just like an untreated cancer can become life-threatening in a short time, internal conflicts will worsen with increased aloneness.

3. We try to use willpower to solve our problems. The problem with this approach is that it makes an idol out of the will, something God never intended. Just as our hearts and minds are distorted by the Fall, so is our power to make right decisions. Will is only strengthened by relationship; we can't make commitments alone. God told Moses to encourage and strengthen Joshua (Deut. 3:28); He didn't tell Moses to tell Joshua to "just say no." If we depend on willpower alone, we are guaranteed to fail. We are denying the power of the relationship promised in the cross. If all we need is our will to overcome evil, we certainly don't need a Savior (I Cor. 1:17).

Why do you submit to [the world's] rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. (Col. 2:20-23)

The King James Bible translates the Greek word for "self-imposed worship" as "will-worship." In other words, these self-denying practices that appear so spiritual don't stop out-of-control behavior. The outlaw part of the soul simply becomes more resentful under the domination of the will—and it rebels. Especially after we make statement such as, " I will never again" or " I will always," The enemy zeros in on the "I" with a vengeance. Whether its indulgence in food, indulgence in money, indulgence in foolish or slanderous conversation, or the determination never to be late on a project again will not be healed by just the will. However, making your will God's Will does the trick every time.

Learning to be mature in setting limits is not easy. Many obstacles hinder our progress; however, God desires our maturity and self-control even more than we do. He's on our team as an exhorter, encourager, and implorer (I Thess. 2:11—12). One way to begin developing limits on out-of-control behavior is to apply a modified version of the [Limits Setting Checklist](#):

1. [What are the symptoms?](#) Look at the destructive fruit you may be exhibiting by not being able to say **no** to yourself. You may be experiencing depression, anxiety, panic, phobias, rage, relationship struggles, isolation, work problems, or psychosomatic illnesses.

All of these symptoms can be related to a difficulty in setting limits on your own behavior. Use them as a road map to begin identifying the particular problem you're having.

2. [What are the roots?](#) Identifying the causes of your self

indulgence problems will assist you in understanding your own contribution to the problem (how you have sinned), your developmental injuries (how you have been sinned against), and the significant relationships that may have contributed to the issue.

Some possible roots of limits conflicts include:

Lack of training. Some people never learned to accept limits, to pay the consequences of their actions, or to delay gratification when they were growing up. For example, they may never have experienced any consequences for dawdling as a child.

Rewarded destructiveness. People who come from families in which the mom or dad was an alcoholic may have learned that out-of-control behavior brings relationship. The family came together when the alcoholic member drank.

Distorted need. God-given needs in disguise. God gave us sexual desire both to reproduce ourselves and to enjoy our spouses. The pornography addict has diverted this good desire; he feels real and alive only when acting out.

Fear of relationship. People really want to be loved but their out-of-control behavior (i.e., overeating, overworking) keeps others away. Some people use their tongues to keep other people at bay.

Unmet emotional hungers. We all need love during the first few years of life. If we don't receive this love, we hunger for it for the rest of our lives. This hunger for love is so powerful that when we don't find it in

relationships with other people, we look for it in other places, such as in food, in work, in sexual activity, or in spending money.

Being under the law. Many Christians raised in legalistic environments were not permitted to make decisions for themselves. When they try to make their own decisions, they feel guilty. This guilt forces them to rebel in destructive ways. Food addictions and compulsive spending are often reactions against strict rules.

Covering emotional hurt. People who are injured emotionally, who were neglected or abused as children, disguise their pain by overeating, drinking too much, or working too much. They may abuse substances to distract from the real pain of being unloved, unwanted, and alone. If they were to stop using these disguises, their isolation would be intolerable.

3. **What is the conflict?** Take a look at your particular self indulgent problems in relation to eating, money, time, task completion, the tongue, sexuality, or alcohol and substance abuse. These seven areas aren't exhaustive, though they cover a great deal of territory. Ask God for insight into what other areas of your life are out of control.

4. **Who needs to take ownership?** At this point, take the painful step of taking responsibility for your out-of-control behavior. The behavior pattern may be directly traceable" to family problems, neglect, abuse, or trauma. In other words, our conflicts may not be all our fault. They are, however, our responsibility.

5. **What do you need?** It's useless to try to deal with your

conflicts with yourself until you're actively developing safe, trusting, grace-and-truth relationships with others. You are severely hampered in gaining either insight into or control over yourself when you are disconnected from God's source of spiritual and emotional fuel.

Plugging in to other people is often frustrating for "do-it-yourself" people who would like a how-to manual for solving out-of-control behaviors just as they would buy to teach themselves piano, plumbing, or golf. They wish to get this limits setting business over with quickly.

The problem is that many people with self indulgent struggles are also quite isolated from deep relationships. They have no "rootedness" in God or others (Eph. 3:17). Thus, they have to take what they think are steps backward to learn to connect with others. Connecting with people is a time-consuming, risky, and painful process. Finding the right people, group, or church is hard enough, but after joining up, admitting your need for others may be even more difficult.

Do-it-yourself people will often fall back into a cognitive or willpower approach, simply because it's not as slow or as risky. They'll often say things like, "Attachment is not what I want. I have an out-of-control behavior, and I need relief from the pain!" Though we can certainly understand their dilemma, they're heading toward another quick-fix dead end. Symptomatic relief—trying to solve a problem by only dealing with the symptoms—generally leads to more symptoms. Jesus described this process in a parable:

When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes

through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, "I will return to the house I left." When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the last. (Luke 1:21-26)

Evil can take over the empty house of our souls. Even when our lives seem to be in order, isolation guarantees spiritual vulnerability. It's only when our house is full of the love of God and others that we can resist the wiles of the devil. Plugging in is neither an option, nor a luxury; it is a spiritual and emotional life-and-death issue.

6. How do I begin? Once you have identified your problem and owned it, you can do something about it. Here are some ways to begin practicing setting limits on yourself.

Address your real need. Often, out-of-control patterns disguise a need for something else. You need to address the underlying need before you can deal with the out-of-control behavior. For example, impulsive eaters may discover that food is a way to stay separate and safe from romantic and sexual intimacy. Their fear of being faced with those kinds of emotionally laden situations may cause them to use food as a boundary. As their internal boundaries with the opposite sex become firmer, they can give up their destructive food boundary. They learn to ask for help for the real problem-not just for the symptomatic problem.

Allow yourself to fail. Addressing your real need is no guarantee that your out-of-control behavior will disappear. Many people who address the real issue underneath a self-boundary problem are often disappointed that the problem keeps recurring. They think, "Well, I joined a support group at church, but I still have problems being on time, or viewing pornography, or spending money, or talking out of turn. Was all this for naught?"

No. The recurrence of destructive patterns is evidence of God's sanctifying, maturing, and preparing us for eternity. We need to continue to practice to learn things. The same process that we use to learn to drive a car, swim, or learn a foreign language is the one we use for learning better self-boundaries.

Those people who spend their lives trying to avoid failure are also eluding maturity. We are drawn to Jesus because **"he learned obedience from what he suffered" (Heb. 5:8)**. People who are growing up are also drawn to individuals who bear battle scars, worry furrows, and tear marks on their faces. Their lessons can be trusted, much more than the unlined faces of those who have never failed and so have never truly lived.

Listen to empathic feedback from others. As you fail in setting boundaries on yourself, you need others who will let you know about it in a caring way. Many times, you are unaware of your own failures. Sometimes you may not truly understand the extent of the damage your lack of setting limits causes in the lives of those you care about.

For example, Keith had a difficult time returning money

to others when they had loaned it to him. He wasn't broke. He wasn't selfish. He was just forgetful. He had little awareness of the discomfort he caused those who lent him money.

One afternoon a friend who had loaned him money several months before dropped by his office.

"Keith," his friend said, "Several times I've asked you about the money I lent you. I still haven't heard from you. I don't think you're intentionally ignoring my requests. At the same time I wanted to let you know that your forgetfulness; has been hard on me. I had to cancel a vacation because I didn't have the money. Your forgetfulness is hurting me, and it's hurting our friendship."

Keith was astonished. He hadn't had a clue that such a little thing to him might mean so much to a close friend. Deeply remorseful over the loss his friend had suffered, he wrote a check immediately.

In a non-condemning, non-nagging manner, Keith's friend had helped him become more aware of his problem. He used the empathy Keith felt for him as a close friend. True godly remorse for causing his friend pain was a powerful motivator for Keith to become more responsible. When others in our support system let us know how our lack of self-boundaries hurts them, we are motivated by love, not by fear.

Biblically based support groups, which provide empathy and clear feedback, keep people responsible by letting them see the effect their actions have; on another. When one member tells another. "Your uncontrolled behavior

make me want to stay away from you. I don't feel that I can trust you when you act like that," the out-of-control person isn't being parented or policed. He is hearing truth in love from a peer. He's hearing how what he does helps or damages those he loves. This kind of confrontation builds an empathy-based morality, a love-based self-control.

Welcome consequences as a teacher. Learning about sowing and reaping is valuable. It teaches us that we suffer losses when we aren't responsible. The impulsive overeater has medical and social difficulties. The overspender faces bankruptcy court. The chronically late person misses plane flights and important meetings, and loses friendships. The procrastinator faces losses of promotions and bonuses. And on and on.

We need to enter God's training school of learning the consequences for our irresponsibility.

Learning how to develop better self control is an orderly process. First, we are confronted about the destructiveness of our behavior by others. Then consequences will follow if we don't heed the feedback. Words precede actions and give us a chance to turn from our destructiveness before we have to suffer.

God doesn't glory in our suffering. Just as a loving father's heart breaks when He sees his children in pain, God wants to spare us pain. But when His words and the feedback of His other children don't reach us, consequences are the only way to keep us from further damage. God is like the parent who warns His teenager that drinking will cause a loss of car privileges. First, the

warning: "Stop drinking now. It will have bad consequences for you." Then, if it's not heeded, car privileges are yanked. This painful consequence prevents a possible serious catastrophe: a drunk-driving accident.

Surround yourself with people who are loving and supportive. As you hear feedback and suffer consequences, maintain close contact with your support network. Your difficulties are too much to bear alone. You need others who will be loving and supportive, but who will not rescue.

Generally speaking, friends of people with self control problems make one of two errors:

(1) **They become critical and parental.** When the person has failed, they adopt an "I told you so" attitude, or say things like, "Now, what did you learn from your experience?" This encourages the person to either look elsewhere for a friend (no one needs more than two parents), or simply avoid the criticism, instead of learning from consequences. **"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Gal. 6:1).**

Replace this parental position with gentle restoration, understanding that "there but for the grace of God go I."

(2) **They become rescuers.** They give in to their impulse to save the person from suffering. They call the office and tell them their spouse was sick when he or she was drunk. They lend more money when they shouldn't. They hold up the entire dinner for the latecomer, instead of going ahead with with the meal.

Constantly rescuing someone is not loving them. God's love lets people experience consequences. Rescuers hope that by once again bailing out the out-of-control person, they'll reap a loving, responsible person. They hope to control the other person.

It's far better to be empathic, but at the same time refuse to be a safety net: "I'm sorry you lost another job this year, but I won't lend you any more money until you've paid back the other loan. However, I'm available to talk to for support." This approach will show people how serious you are about developing limits. The sincere searcher will value this approach and will take you up on your offer of support. The manipulator will resent the limits and quickly look for an easier touch somewhere else.

This five-point formula for developing self-boundaries is cyclical. That is, as you deal with real needs, fail, get empathic feedback, suffer consequences, and are restored, you build stronger internal limits each time. As you stay with your goal and with the right people, you will build a sense of self-restraint that can truly become part of your character for life.

If You Are a Victim

Establishing limits for yourself is always hard. It will be especially difficult if your boundaries were severely violated in childhood. No one who has avoided childhood victimization can truly understand what these individuals go through. Of all the injuries that can be endured, this type causes severe spiritual and emotional damage.

A victim is a person who has, while in a helpless state, been injured by the exploitation of another. Some victimization is verbal, some is physical, some is sexual, and some is satanically ritualistic. All cause extreme damage to the character structure of a child, who then grows up to adulthood with spiritual, emotional, and cognitive distortions. In each case, however, three factors remain constant: helplessness, injury, and exploitation.

Some results of victimization are these:

- depression**
- compulsive disorders**
- impulsive disorders**
- isolation**
- inability to trust others**
- inability to form close attachments**
- inability to set limits**
- poor judgment in relationships**
- further exploitation in relationships**
- deep sense of pervasive badness**
- shame**
- guilt**
- chaotic lifestyle**
- sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness**
- unexplainable terror and panic attacks**
- phobias**
- rage attacks**
- suicidal feelings and thoughts**

Victimization has long-lasting and far-reaching effects on the lives of adult survivors. Healing for victims is difficult because their developmental processes have been damaged or interrupted by abuse. The most

primary damage is that the victim loses a sense of trust. Trust, and depending on ourselves and others in times of need, is a basic-spiritual and emotional survival need. We need to be able to trust our own perceptions of reality and to be able to let significant people matter to us.

Our ability to trust ourselves is based on our experience of others as trustworthy. People who are "like a tree planted by streams of water" (Ps. 1:3) feel firm because of the streams of love coming from God and others in their life.

Victims often lose a sense of trust because the perpetrator was someone they knew as children, someone who was important to them. When the relationship became damaging to them, their sense of trust became broken.

Another damaging effect of abuse or molestation is the destruction of a sense of ownership over the victim's soul. In fact, victims often feel that they are public property-that their resources, body, and time should be available to others just for the asking.

Another injury due to victimization is a deep, pervasive sense of being "all-bad," wrong, dirty, or shameful. No matter how affirming others are of their loveableness and their attributes, victims are convinced that, underneath it all, there is no good inside themselves. Because of the severity of their injuries, many victims have overpermeable boundaries. They take on badness that isn't theirs. They begin believing that the way they were treated is the way they should be treated. Many victims think that, since they were told they were bad or

evil thousands of times, it certainly must be true.

Setting Limits as an Aid to the Victim

The information described in this material can be extremely helpful in moving victims toward restoration and healing. However, in many cases the severe nature of the need is such that the victim will be unable to set boundaries without professional help. I strongly urge abuse victims to seek out a spiritual counselor who can guide them in establishing and maintaining appropriate limits.

Setting Limits In The Workplace

When I was a child I studied Adam and Eve and the Fall in Sunday School. I learned that the Fall was the beginning of everything "bad." That day I went home and said to my mother, "I don't like Adam and Eve. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't have to clean up my room!"

Work at age eight wasn't fun, and because it wasn't fun, it had to be bad. Because it was bad, it was Adam's fault. A simple ideological theory for a youngster, but it was youthful heresy.

Work existed before the Fall; it was always part of God's plan for humanity. He planned for people to do two things. They would subdue and they would rule (Gen. 1:28). They would bring the earth under their domain, and they would manage it. That sounds like a lot of work to me!

But because Eden was in paradise, our difficulties with work came later, after the Fall. God said to Adam: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:17-19).

Other aspects of the Fall also affected our work. The first is the tendency toward disownership. We talked in earlier sessions about not taking responsibility for what is ours. This started in the garden when Adam and Eve

tried to pass the blame on to another for their original act of sinning. Adam blamed Eve; Eve blamed the serpent (Gen. 3:11-13). They were disowning their responsibility and blaming another.

The Fall also divided love from work. Before the Fall Adam was connected to the love of God and from that that state, he worked. After the Fall, he was not motivated by perfect love, but he had to work as a part of the fallen curse and the law. Therefore the love-motivated "want to" became the law-motivated "have to."

Paul tells us the law's "have to" increases our desire to rebel (Rom. 5:20); it makes us angry at what we "have to" (Rom. 4:15); and it arouses our motivations to do the wrong thing (Rom. 7:5). All of this adds up to the human race unable to take responsibility and work effectively by own its behaviors, talents, and choices. No wonder we have problems.

In this message, we want to look at how the principle of re-work helps resolve many work-related problems, as well as help you to be happier and more fulfilled at the work you do.

Work and Character Development

Christians often have a warped way of looking at work unless someone is working full-time "in the ministry," they see work as secular. However, this view of work distorts the biblical picture. All of us-not only full-time ministers have gifts and talents that we contribute to

humanity. We all have a vocation, a "calling" into service. Wherever we work, whatever we do, we are to do "unto the Lord" (Col. 3:23). Jesus used parables about work to teach us how to grow spiritually. These parables deal with money, with completing tasks, with faithful stewardship of a job, and with honest emotional dealings in work. They all teach character development in the context of relating to God and others. They teach a work ethic based on love under God.

Work is a spiritual activity. In our work, we are made in the image of God, who is Himself a worker, a manager, a creator, a developer, a steward, and a healer. To be like Him is to be a co-laborer with God in the community of humanity. In working and giving to others we find true fulfillment.

The New Testament teaches that jobs offer more than temporal fulfillment and rewards on earth. Work is the place to develop our character in preparation for the work that we will do forever. With that in mind, let's look at how setting boundaries in the workplace can help us to grow spiritually.

Challenges in the Workplace

A lack of boundaries or setting limits creates problems in the workplace. During my experience I have seen lack of boundaries as the major problem in many workplace squabbles. If people took responsibility for their own work and set clear limits, most of the problems in the work place would be eliminated.

Let's see how applying boundaries or limits can solve some common problems in the workplace.

Situation #1: Getting Saddled with Another Person's Responsibilities

Let's take the example of Margaret and Sam. Margaret is an administrative assistant in a small company that plans training sessions for industry. She's responsible for booking the training sessions and managing the speakers' schedules. A co-worker, Sam, is responsible for the training facilities. He takes the materials to the site, sets up the equipment, and orders the food. Together, Margaret and Sam make the events happen.

After a few months of really liking her work, Margaret began to lose energy. Eventually, her friend and co-worker, Linda, asked her what was wrong. Margaret couldn't put her finger on the problem at first. Then she realized: The problem was Sam!

Sam had been asking Margaret to "pick this up for me while you're out," or "please bring this box of materials to the workshop." Slowly, Sam was shifting his responsibilities onto Margaret.

"You have to stop doing Sam's work," Linda told Margaret. "Just do your own work and don't worry about him."

"What if things go wrong?" Margaret replied, Linda shrugged. "Then they'll know who is responsible." "Sam will be angry with me for not helping," Margaret said "Let him," said Linda. "His anger can't do as much as his poor work habits can."

So Margaret began to set limits on Sam. She told him. "I do not have time to bring the materials for you this

week” when Sam ran out of time to do things himself, Margaret "I'm sorry that you have not done that before now, I understand that you are in a bind. Maybe next time you'll plan better. That's not my job."

Some trainers were angry that their equipment wasn't set up, and customers were angry that no food was provided for the break. But the boss tracked down the problem to the person who was responsible-Sam and told him to shape up, or find another job. In the end, Margaret began to like her work again, and Sam began to get more responsible. All because Margaret set boundaries and stuck to them.

If you are being saddled with another person's responsibilities and feel resentful, you need to take responsibility of your feelings, and realize that your unhappiness is not your co-worker's fault, but your own. In this as in any other boundary conflict, you first must take responsibility for yourself.

Then you must act responsibly to your co-worker. Go to your co-worker and explain your situation. When he asks you to do something that is not your responsibility, say no and refuse to do whatever it is that he wants you to do. If he gets angry at you for saying no, be firm about your limits and empathize with his anger. Don't get angry back. To fight anger with anger is to get hooked into his game. Keep your emotional distance and say, "I am sorry if this upsets you. But that job is not my responsibility. I hope you get it worked out."

If he continues to argue, tell him that you are finished discussing it; he can come and find you when he is ready to talk about something else. Do not fall into the

trap of justifying why you can't do his work for him. You will be slipping into his thinking that you should be doing his work if you are able to, and he will try to find a way that you can. You owe no one an explanation about why you will not do something that is not your responsibility.

Many over responsible people who work next to under-responsible people bear the consequences for their co-workers. Always covering for them, or bailing them out, they are not enjoying their work or their relationships with these people. Their lack of limits is hurting them, as well as keeping the other person from growing. If you are one of these people, you need to learn to set boundaries.

Sometimes, however, a co-worker will genuinely need some extra help. It is perfectly legitimate to bail out a responsible co-worker, or to make special concessions to a colleague who uses those concessions responsibly to get well. This is love, and good companies operate lovingly.

Favors and sacrifices are part of the Christian life. Enabling is not. Learn to tell the difference by seeing if your giving is helping the other to become better or worse. The Bible requires responsible action out of the one who is given to. If you do not see it after a season, set limits (Luke 13:9).

Situation #2: Working Too Much Overtime

Many bosses are not planners. Their employees have to take responsibility for their lack of planning and never set limits on them. These bosses are never forced to

look at the issue until it's too late, until they have lost a good employee to exhaustion or burnout. Such bosses need limits, but many employees are afraid to set them, because they need the job or they fear disapproval. If you are in a situation in which you're doing lots of extra work because you "need the job" and because you are afraid of being let go, you have a problem. If you are working more overtime than you want to, you are in bondage to your job. You are a slave, not an employee under contract. Clearly defined responsible contracts tell all parties involved what is expected of them, and they can be enforced. Jobs should have clear descriptions of duties and qualifications.

As hard as it sounds, you need to take responsibility for yourself and take steps to change your situation. Here are some suggested steps you may wish to take:

1. **Set limits on your work.** Decide how much overtime you are willing to do. Some overtime during seasonal crunches may be expected of you.
2. **Review your job description, if one exists.**
3. **Make a list of the tasks you need to complete in the next month.** Make a copy of the list and assign your own priority to each item. Indicate on this copy any tasks that are not part of your job description.
4. **Make an appointment to see your boss to discuss your job overload.** Together you should review the list of tasks you need to complete in the next month. Have your boss prioritize the tasks. If your boss wants all the tasks done, and you cannot complete these tasks in the time you are willing to give, your boss may need to hire

temporary help to complete those tasks. Remember to take the list in with you to your boss. Your conversation should center on prioritizing not complaining. You may also wish to review your job description with your boss at this time if you think you are setting limits that fall outside your domain. If your boss still has unreasonable expectations of you, you may wish to take a co-worker or two along with you to another meeting (according to the biblical model in Matthew or you may wish to discuss your problem with the appropriate person in your personnel department. If even he remains unreasonable about what he thinks you can accomplish you may need to begin looking for another job within your company or outside, you may need to go to night school and get some further training to open up other opportunities. You may need to track down hundreds of employment ads and send out is of resumes. You may need to start your own business. You may wish to start an emergency fund to survive between quitting your present job and starting a new one.

Whatever you do, remember that your job overload is your responsibility and your problem. If your job is driving you up the wall, you need to do something about it. Own the problem. Stop being a victim of an abusive situation and start setting some limits.

Situation #3: Misplaced Priorities

We have talked about setting limits on someone else. You also need to set limits on yourself. You need to realize how much time and energy you have, and manage your work accordingly. Know what you can do and when you can do it, and say no to everything else. Learn to know your limits and enforce them, Say to your

team or your boss, "If I am going to do A today, I will not be able to do B until Wednesday. Is that okay or do we need to rethink which one I need to be working on?"

Effective workers do two things: they strive to do excellent work, and they spend their time on the most important things. Many people do excellent work but allow themselves to get sidetracked by unimportant things; they may do unimportant things very well! They feel like they are doing a great job, but then the boss is upset because a percentage goals are not being met. Then they feel unappreciated and resentful because they have put out so much effort-were working hard, but they weren't placing limits on what they allowed to take up their time, and the important things did not get their attention.

Say no to the unimportant, and say no to the inclination to do less than your best. If you are doing your best work on the most important things, you will reach your goals.

In addition to saying no to the unimportant, you need to make a plan to accomplish the important things, and place some fences around your tasks. Realize your limits; make sure you do not allow work to control your life. Having limits will force you to prioritize. If you make a commitment to spend only so many hours a week on work, you will use those hours more wisely. If you know your time is limited then you can not say yes to everything. Saying yes to the best, sometimes means you will need to say no to the good.

A minister I know ministry required a lot of travel, so he and his wife put their heads together and decided that

he would spend no more than one hundred nights a year on the road. When he gets an offer he has to seek the Lord and check his time budget to see if this is something he wants to spend some of his nights on. This plan forces him to get before Lord and be more selective in his travel, thereby saving time for the rest of his life.

A former co-worker of mine who was allowing work to keep him away from home too much made a commitment to spend only forty-five hours a week in the office. At first, he really struggled because he wasn't used to budgeting his time and commitments so closely. Slowly though, when he realized that he only had so much time, he began to spend it more wisely. He even got more accomplished because he was forced to work smarter.

Work will grow to fill the time you have set aside for it. If a meeting does not have an agenda with time limits, discussion could be endless. Allot time for certain things, and then keep your limits. You will work smarter and like your work more.

Take a lesson from Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who, seeing Moses' lack of boundaries, asked him why he was working so hard (Exod. 18:14-27).

"Because the people need me," Moses said.

"What you are doing is not good," Jethro replied. "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (vv. 17-18). Even though Moses was doing good work, Jethro saw that he was going to burn himself out. Moses had allowed good work to go

too far. Limits on good things keep them good.

Situation #4: Difficult Co-workers

Today's work environment is becoming increasingly stressful. Many employees are taking stress leaves. When these situations are unraveled, the "stress at work" often turns out to be somebody at the office who is driving the stressed-out person ballistic. This person in the office or workplace has a strong influence over the emotional life of the person in pain, and he or she does not know how to deal with it.

In this case you need to remember the Law of Power: You only have the power to change yourself. You can't change another person. You must see yourself as having the issue, not the other person. To see another person as the problem to be fixed is to give that person power over you and your well-being. Because you cannot change another person, you are out of control. The real problem lies in how you are relating to the problem person. You are the one in pain, and only you have the power to fix it.

Many people have found immense relief in the thought that they have no control over another person and that they must focus on changing their reactions to that person. They must refuse to allow that person to affect them. This idea is life changing, the beginning of true self-control.

Situation #5: Critical Attitudes

Stress is often caused by working with or for someone who is supercritical. People will get hooked into either trying to win over the critical person, which can almost

never be done, or by allowing the person to provoke them to anger. Some people internalize the criticism and get down on themselves. All of these reactions indicate an inability to stand apart from the critical person and keep one's boundaries.

Allow these critical people to be who they are, but keep yourself separate from them and do not internalize their opinion of you. Make sure you have a more accurate appraisal of yourself, and then disagree internally.

You may also want to confront the overly critical person according to the biblical model (Matt. 18). At first tell her how you feel about her attitude and the way it affects you. If she is wise, she will listen to you. If not, and her attitude is disruptive to others as well, two or more of you might want to talk to her. If she will not agree to change, you may want to tell her that you do not wish to talk with her until she gets her attitude under control.

Or you can follow the company's grievance policy. **The important thing to remember is that you can't control her, but you can choose to limit your exposure to her, either physically or emotionally distancing yourself from her. This is self-control.**

Avoid trying to gain the approval of this sort of person. It will never work, and you will only feel controlled. And avoid getting in arguments and discussions. You will never win. Remember the Proverb, **"Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you" (Prov. 9:7, 8).** If you allow them to draw you in, thinking that you will change them, you are asking them for trouble. Stay

separate. Keep your boundaries. Don't get sucked into their game.

Situation #6: Conflicts with Authority

If you are having trouble getting along with your boss, you may be having "transference feelings." Transference is when you experience feelings in the present that really belong to some unfinished business in the past.

Transference happens frequently with bosses because they are authority figures. The boss-employee relationship can trigger authority conflicts you might have. You can begin to have strong reactions that are not appropriate to the current relationship.

Suppose your supervisor tells you that he wants something done differently. Immediately you feel "put down." You think, He never thinks I do anything right. I'll show him. Your supervisor may have made the comment in passing, but the feelings it triggered were very strong indeed. The reality is that the interaction may be tapping into unresolved hurt from past authority relationships, such as parents or teachers.

When a transference relationship starts, you may begin to act out all the old patterns you did with parents. This never works. You become a child on the job.

If you find yourself having strong reactions to someone, take some time and look inside to see if the feelings are familiar. Do they remind you of someone from the past? Did Mom or Dad treat you like that? Do they have the same personality as this person?

You are responsible for working out these feelings. Until you face your own feelings, you can't even see who others really are. You are looking at them through your own distortions, through your own unfinished business. When you see others clearly without transference, you will know how to deal with them.

Another example would be strong feelings of competition with a co-worker. This may represent some competitive relationship from the past, such as sibling rivalry, that has not been worked through. Whenever you experience strong feelings, see them as part of your responsibility. This will lead you to any unfinished business and healing, as well as keep you from acting irrationally toward co-workers and bosses. Leave the past in the past, deal with it, and do not allow it to interfere with present relationships.

Situation #7: Expecting Too Much of Work

People increasingly come to the workplace wanting the company to be a "family." In a society where the family, church, and community are not the support structures they once were, people look to their colleagues for the emotional support a family once provided. This lack of limits between the personal and work life is fraught with all sorts of difficulties.

The workplace ideally should be supportive, safe, and nurturing. But this atmosphere should primarily support the employee in work-related ways—to help her learn, improve, and get a job done. The problem arises when someone wants the job to provide what her parents did not provide for her: primary nurturing, relationship, self-esteem, and approval. Work is not set up this way, nor is

it what the typical job asks of someone. The inherent conflict in this set-up is this: The job expects adult functioning, and the person wants childhood needs met. These differing expectations will inevitably collide. Health comes from owning unmet childhood needs and working them out. The problem is that the workplace is not the place to do that. There are expectations at work. They will ask from you without giving because they are going to pay you for your work. They are not obligated to provide all the emotional support you need.

You need to make sure you are meeting your needs for support and emotional repair outside of work. Plug into supportive and healing networks that will help you to grow out of your emotional hurts and unmet needs, and build you up so you can function well at the job, in the adult world that has adult expectations. Get your relationship needs met outside of work, and then you will be able to work the best without getting your needs mixed up with what the company needs from you. Keep your boundaries firm; protect those hurt places from the workplace, which is not only not set up to heal, but also may wound unintentionally.

Situation #8: Taking Work-Related Stress Home

Just as we should keep good boundaries on our personal issues and keep them out of the workplace, we need to keep some boundaries on work and keep it out of the home. This generally has two components.

The first is emotional. Conflicts at work need to be dealt with and worked through so they do not begin to affect the rest of your life. If denied, they can cause major depressions and other illnesses that begin to spill over into other areas of life.

Make sure you understand work issues and face them directly so that work does not emotionally control your life. Find out why a certain co-worker is able to get to you, or why your boss is able to control the rest of your life. Find out why your successes or failures on the job are able to bring you up or down. These important character issues need to be worked through. Otherwise, the job will own you.

The second component is finite things such as time, energy, and other resources. Make sure that the job, which is literally never done, does not continue to spill over into personal life and cost you relationships and other things that matter. Put limits on special projects that are going to take more time than usual, and make sure overtime does not become a pattern. One company I know has such a high value for family that they dock people for working overtime! They want them to put limits on their work and be home with the family. Find out your own limits and live by them. These are good boundaries.

Situation #9: Disliking Your Job

Our work is part of our identity in that it taps into our particular giftedness and the exercise of those gifts in the community.

However, many people are unable to ever find a true work identity. They stumble from job to job, never really finding anything that is "them." More often than not, this is a boundary problem. They have not been able to own their own gifts, talents, wants, desires, and dreams because they are unable to set limits on others' definitions and expectations of them.

This happens with people who have not separated from the family they grew up in. A pastor was having great difficulty with his church and the board of elders. Finally, right in the middle of a meeting, he said, "I never wanted to be a pastor anyway. It was my mother's wish, not mine." He did not have good enough boundaries with his mother to define his own career path. As a result, he had fused with her wishes and was miserable. His heart had not been in it from the start. He had not been called by the Lord. He was called by his mother.

This can happen also with friends and culture. Others' expectations can be very strong influences. You must make sure that your boundaries are strong enough that you do not let others define you. Instead, work with God to find out who you really are and what kind of work you are made for. **Romans 12:2 speaks of having boundaries against these kinds of pressures from others: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."** You should have a realistic expectation of yourself based on who you really are your own true self with your own particular giftedness. You can only do this with boundaries that stand up and say, "This is me, and that is not me." Stand up against others' expectations of you.

Finding Your Life's Work

Finding your life's work involves taking risks. First you need to firmly establish your identity, separating yourself from those you are attached to and following your desires. You must take ownership of how you feel,

how you think, and what you want. You must assess your talents and limitations. And then you must begin to step out as God leads you.

For God wants you to discover and use your gifts to His Glory. He asks only that you include him in the process: "Delight yourself in the lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the lord, trust in him and he will do this" (Ps. 37:4-5).

God also, however, calls you to be accountable for what you do: "Follow the ways of your heart and what your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment" (Eccl. 11:9).

As you develop your talents, look at your work as a partnership between you and God. He has given you gifts, and He wants you to develop them. Commit your way to the Lord, and you will find your work identity. Ask Him to help.

Change Model

1. Realize the resistance. You may think, "Oh, I just need to set some limits," and that you are then on the road to getting better. If it were this easy, you would have done it years earlier. Confess that you do not want to change because you are afraid. You sabotage your freedom because of inside resistance (Rom. 7:15, 19).

3. Seek grace and truth. As in every other step in the recovery process, you cannot face these hard truths in a vacuum. You need the support of others to help you own up to your internal resistance and also to empower you to do the work of grief. Good grief can only take place in relationship. We need grace from God and others.

4. Identify the unmet need. Behind the failure to change is the **fear** of loss. Identify whose love you are going to have to give up if you choose to live. Place a name to it. Who are you going to have to place on the altar and give to God? Your strong tie to that person is keeping you stuck. **"You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections"** (II Cor. 6:12 nab). Like the Corinthians who would not open up to Paul's love, you get stuck in your "affections," your ties to people you need to let go of.

5. Let go. In the safety of your supportive relationships, face what you will never have from this person, or who this person symbolizes. This will be like a funeral. You will go through the stages of grief: denial, anger, sadness, madness, and acceptance. You may not necessarily go through these stages in this order, but you will probably feel all these emotions. This is normal.

Get with supportive people and talk about your losses. These **unmet** needs run very deep and may be very painful to face. To let go of what you never had is difficult. But in the end you will save your life by losing it. Only God can fill the empty place with the love of other people and Himself.

6. Move on. Seek and you will find." God has a special place just for you. Move from that 'stuck' position into the Family of God.

Here are some practical suggestions that will help with changes you will face as you persevere toward your God-given goals:

Lean on your support group. Surround yourself with individuals with similar goals and aspirations. Remember, as the disciples were venturing into the unknown, Jesus prayed for their unity and love for each other. (John 17).

Learn from the testimony of others. Experience has shown that it is very helpful to people who are daring new things in a particular area of their life. It is important to hear the testimony of others. Listen to their trials, how they were in your shoes, and how God was faithful to them.

Have confidence in your ability to learn new things. There is nothing that you are presently doing that you did not learn. At one time the things you are now able to do were once unfamiliar. "Learn that you have the ability to learn."

Rework past experiences. Often when you make a

change or go through a loss, you find that your sadness seemed greater than the situation warrants; these heightened emotions may come from past hurts or memories of change. Seek God and determine if some of your fear and pain is coming from something unresolved in the past. Some emotional trauma you sustained. You maybe see your current situation through the eyes of a six-year-old instead of a thirty-six-year old. Let God help you to heal that pain, rework the past, so that it does not become the future. One of ways we will use to rework the past will be in form of writing a letter to your abuser(s). Details will be discussed later in the message.

Structure. For many people life changes are unbearable because of the loss of structure they entail. God's plan for you requires faith. His plan will require you to venture into the unfamiliar. In such changes, we often lose both internal and external structures. Things we used to depend on inside are no longer there, and people, places, and schedules that made us secure on the outside have disappeared. There will be a need in some instances to create new networks.

Creating internal as well as external structure will help in these times of reorganization. Internal structure will come from creating new values and beliefs, learning new spiritual principles and information, having new disciplines and plans and sticking to them, and having others listen are all structure building. But while you are doing this, you may also need some strong external structure. Set a certain time every day to call a friend, schedule weekly meeting times with your support group, or join a regular Bible study. In changing times, you may need some structure around in which to orient

your new changes. Constructing new structures as you grow, will minimize the overwhelming nature of change.

Remember what God has done. The Bible is full of God's reminding his people of the things He has done in the past to give them faith for the future. **Hope is rooted in memory.** We remember getting help in the past and that gives us hope for the future. If you have been a Christian for a long time, look back into your life and remember how He has intervened, the situations from which He has delivered you, the ways that He has come through for you. Remember the grace He has shown us in His Son. He did not do that for nothing: He did it for our redemption and restoration.

We do not know God's timing, but because you have received the restoration process, means He is moving in your life. The time of your deliverance is here. Hang on and let God do for you what he has done for so many. **"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised" (Heb. 10:35, 36).**

Rework Past Experiences

Healing the Trauma



Maintaining Boundaries

We have talked about the necessity of boundaries and their wonderful value in our lives. In fact, we have all but said that life without boundaries is no life at all. But establishing and maintaining boundaries takes a lot of work, discipline, and, most of all, desire.

The driving force behind setting limits has to be desire. We usually know what is the right thing to do in life, but we are rarely motivated to do it unless there's a good reason. That we should be obedient to God, who tells us to set and maintain boundaries, is certainly the best reason. But sometimes we need a more compelling reason than obedience. We need to see that what is right is also good for us. And we usually only see these good reasons when we're in pain. Our pain motivates us to act.

Even with the desire for a better life, we can be reluctant to do the work of setting limits for another reason: it will be a war. There will be skirmishes and battles. There will be disputes. There will be losses.

The idea of spiritual warfare is not new. For thousands of years, God has given people the choice of living lives of ruin, or possessing what He has secured for them. And it has always involved battles. When He led the Israelites out of Egypt toward the Promised Land, they had to fight many battles and learn numerous lessons before they could possess the land.

For believers it still boils down to fighting the good fight of faith.

As we become like Him, He is redeeming our boundaries and our limits. He has defined who we are and what our limits are so that He can bless us: "LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance" (Ps. 16:5-6).

The battles fall into two categories: outside resistance and inside resistance-the resistance we get from others and the resistance we get from ourselves.

Outside Resistance

The most common resistance one gets from the outside is anger. People who get angry at others for setting limits have a character flaw. Self-centered, they think the world exists for them and their comfort. They see others as extensions of themselves.

When they hear no, they have the same reaction a two year-old has when deprived of something: "Bad Mommy." They feel as though the one who deprives them of their wishes is "bad," and they become angry. They are not righteously angry at a real offense. Nothing has been done "to them" at all. It is simply that someone will not do something "for" them. Their wish is being frustrated, and they get angry because they have not learned to delay gratification or to respect others' freedom (Prov. 19:19).

The angry person has a character problem. If you reinforce this character problem, it will return tomorrow and the next day in other situations. It is not the situation that's making the person angry, but the feeling that they are **entitled** to things from others. They want to

control others and, as a result, they have no control over themselves.

The first thing you need to learn is that the person who is angry at you for setting boundaries is the one with the problem. If you do not realize this, you may think you have a problem. Maintaining your boundaries is good for other people; it will help them learn what their families of origin did not teach them: to respect other people.

Second, you must view anger realistically. Anger is only a feeling inside the other person. It cannot jump across the room and hurt you. It cannot "get inside" you unless you allow it. Staying separate from another's anger is vitally important. Let the anger be in the other person. He will have to feel his anger to get better. If you either rescue him from it, or take it on yourself, the angry person will not get better and you will be in bondage.

Third, do not let anger be a cue for you to do something. People without boundaries respond automatically to the anger of others. They rescue, seek approval, or get angry themselves. Do not let an out-of-control person be the cue for you to change your course. Just allow him to be angry and decide for yourself what you need to do.

Fourth, make sure you have your support system in place. If you are going to set some limits with a person who has controlled you with anger, talk to the people in your support system first and make a plan. Know what you will say. Anticipate what the angry person will say, and plan your reaction. You may even want to role-play the situation with your group. Then, make sure your support group will be available to you right after the

confrontation. Perhaps some members of your support group can go with you. But certainly you will need them afterward to keep you from crumbling under the pressure.

Fifth, do not allow the angry person to get you angry. Keep a loving stance while "speaking the truth in love. When we get caught up in the "eye for eye" mentality of the law, or the "returning evil for evil" mentality of the world, we will be in bondage. If we have boundaries, we will be separate enough to love.

Sixth, be prepared to use physical distance and other limits that enforce consequences. One woman's life was changed when she realized that she could say, "I will not allow myself to be yelled at. I will go into the other room until you decide you can talk about this without attacking me. When you can do that, I will talk to you."

These serious steps do not need to be taken with anger. You can empathize lovingly and stay in the conversation, without giving in or being controlled. "I understand that you are upset that I will not do that for you. I am sorry you feel that way. How can I help?" Just remember that when you empathize, changing your no will not help. Offer other options.

If you keep your boundaries, those who are angry at you will have to learn self-control for the first time, instead of "other control," which has been destructive to them anyway. When they no longer have control over you, they will find a different way to relate. But, as long as they can control you with their anger, they will not change.

Sometimes, the hard truth is that they will not talk to you anymore, or they will leave the relationship if they can no longer control you. This is a true risk. God takes this risk every day. He says that He will only do things the right way and that He will not participate in evil. And when people choose their own ways, He lets them go. Sometimes we have to do the same.

Guilt Messages

No weapon in the arsenal of the controlling person is as strong as the guilt message. People with poor boundaries almost always internalize guilt messages leveled at them; they obey guilt-inducing statements that try to make them feel bad. Consider these:

- ◆ "How could you do this to me after all I've done a lot for you?"**
- ◆ "It seems that you could think about someone other than yourself for once."**
- ◆ "If you really loved me, you would make this telephone call for me."**
- ◆ "It seems like you would care enough about the family to do this one thing."**
- ◆ "How can you abandon the family like this?"**
- ◆ "You know how it's turned out in the past when you haven't listened to me."**
- ◆ "After all, you never had to lift a finger around here. It**

seems like it's time you did."

- ◆ "You know that if I had it, I would give it to you. "I"
- ◆ "You have no idea how much we sacrificed for you."
- ◆ "Maybe after I'm dead and gone, you'll be sorry."

Sometimes guilt manipulation comes dressed up in God statements like these:

- ◆ "How can you call yourself a Christian?"
- ◆ "Doesn't the Bible say 'Honor your parents'?"
- ◆ "You're not being very submissive. I'm sure that grieves the Lord."
- ◆ "I thought Christians were supposed to think of others."
- ◆ "What kind of religion would teach you to abandon your own family?"
- ◆ "You must really have a spiritual problem to be acting this way."

People who say these things are trying to make you feel guilty about your choices. They are trying to make you feel bad about deciding how you will spend your own time or resources, about growing up and separating from your parents, or about having a life separate from a friend or spiritual leader. Remember the landowner's

words in the parable of the workers in the vineyard: **"Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?" (Matt. 20:15).** The Bible says that we are to give and not be self-centered. It does not say that we have to give whatever anyone wants from us. We are in control of our giving.

Probably everyone is able in some degree to recognize guilt messages when they hear them. But if you feel bad about your boundaries, maybe you have not looked specifically at the ones your family or other people are using. Here are a few tips about dealing with these external messages:

1. **Recognize guilt messages.** Some people swallow guilt messages without seeing how controlling they are. Be open to rebuke and feedback; you need to know when you are being self-centered. But guilt messages are not given for your growth and good. They are given to manipulate and control.
2. **Guilt messages are really anger in disguise.** The guilt senders are failing to openly admit their anger at you for what you are doing, probably because that would expose how controlling they really are. They would rather focus on you and your behavior than on how they feel. Focusing on their feelings would get them too close to responsibility.
3. **Guilt messages hide sadness and hurt.** Instead of expressing and owning these feelings, people try to steer the focus onto you and what you are doing. Recognize that guilt messages are sometimes an expression of a person's sadness, hurt, or need.

4. **If guilt works on you, recognize that this is your problem and not theirs.** Realize where the real problem is: inside. Then you will be able to deal with the outside correctly-with love and limits. If you continue to blame other people for "making" you feel guilty, they still have power over you, and you are saying that you will only feel good when they stop doing that. You are giving them control over your life. Stop blaming other people.

5. **Do not explain or justify.** Only guilty children do that. This is only playing into their message. You do not owe guilt senders an explanation. Just tell what you have chosen. If you want to tell them why you made a certain decision to help them understand, this is okay. If you wish to get them to not make you feel bad or to resolve your guilt, you are playing into their guilt trap.

6. **Be assertive and interpret their messages as being about their feelings.** "It sounds like **you** are angry that I chose to . . ." "It sounds like **you** are sad that I will not ... "I understand **you** are very unhappy about what I have decided to do. I'm sorry **you** feel that way." "I realize this is disappointing to **you**. How can I help?" "It's hard for **you** when I have other things to do, isn't it?"

The main principle is this: Empathize with the distress people are feeling, but make it clear that it is **their** distress.

Remember, love and limits are the only clear boundaries. If you react, you have lost your boundaries. **"Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man without self-control" (Prov. 25:28).** If other people have the power to get you to react, they are inside your walls, inside your boundaries. Stop reacting. Be proactive.

Give empathy. "Sounds like life is hard right now. Tell me about it." Sometimes people who give guilt messages just want to tell someone how hard it is. Be a listener, but don't take the blame.

Remember the mother who tried to make her son feel guilty. A man with good boundaries would empathize with his mother: "Sounds like you are feeling lonely, Mom." He would make sure she hears that he hears the feeling beneath the guilt message.

Consequences and Countermeasures

Brian was having difficulty with his father, a wealthy man who had always used his money to control other people, even his family. He had taught his children to obey by threatening to cut off his financial support or cut them out of his will.

As Brian got older, he wanted more freedom from his father, but he found himself addicted to the family money and the pleasures it afforded him. He liked being able to take his wife on vacations to the family summer home. He liked the tickets to the Big Ten basketball games and the membership in the country club.

But Brian didn't like what his father's control was costing him emotionally and spiritually. He decided to make some changes. He started saying **no to some of his father's requests that were disruptive to him and his immediate family. He declined to go on some of the holiday trips when his children wanted to do other things. His father did not like that.**

Predictably, he started to cut Brian off from the resources that he had access to. He used him as an

example to the other siblings. He began to lavish more privileges onto Brian's brothers and sister to show Brian his mistake. Lastly, he changed his will.

This was hard for Brian. He had to cut down on his lifestyle and do without some of the things he was used to. He had to make different plans for the future as he had always planned on inheriting his father's money. In short, he had to deal with the consequences of his choice to free himself from his father's control. But, for the first time in his life, he was free.

This scenario is common. It is not always a family fortune that's at stake, but it may be parents' financial support for college. Or it may be a mother's availability to be babysitter. Or a father's help in business. Or it may be as serious as the loss of the relationship. The consequences of setting boundaries will be counter-moves by controlling people. They will react to your act of boundary setting.

First, figure out what it is that you are getting for your lack of boundaries and what you stand to lose by setting limits. In Brian's case it was money. For others, it may be a relationship. Some people are so controlling that if someone starts to stand up to them, they will not relate to them any more. Many people are cut off by the family they grew up in when they stop playing the family's dysfunctional games. Their parents or their "friends" will no longer speak to them.

You face a risk in setting limits and gaining control of your life. In most instances, the results are not drastic, for as soon as the other person finds out that you are serious, they start to change. They find the limit setting

to be something good for them. As Jesus says, you have "won them." The rebuke of a friend turns out to be good medicine. Good, honest people need discipline, and they respond, however reluctantly, to limits. Others have what psychologists call "character disorders"; they don't want to take responsibility for their own actions and lives. When their friends and spouses refuse to take responsibility for them they move on.

When you count the cost of the consequences, as difficult or as costly as they seem, they hardly compare to the loss of your "very self." The message of the Bible is clear: Know the risk and prepare.

Second, decide if you are willing to risk loss. Is the "cross you must pick up" worth it to you for your "very self?" For some, the price is too high. They would rather continue to give in to a controlling parent or friend than to risk the relationship. Intervention specialists caution the family to think hard about whether they are ready to enforce the consequences they agreed on if the alcoholic does not get treatment. Boundaries without consequences are not boundaries. You must decide if you are willing to enforce the consequences before you set the limits.

Third, be diligent about making up for what you have lost. In Brian's case, he had to plan to find a way to make-more money. Others may need to find new child care arrangements, make new friends, or learn to deal with loneliness.

Fourth, do it. There is no way of dealing with the power moves of others and the consequences of our boundaries other than setting the limits and going

through with your plan. When you have a plan, do like Peter: Get out of the boat and make your way toward Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus, **"the author and perfecter" of your faith (Heb. 12:2)**. The first step will be the hardest. Go out and do it, and look for His help. Remember, **"he trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze" (Ps. 18:34)**.

Fifth, realize that the hard part is just beginning. Setting the limit is not the end of the battle. It is the beginning. Now is the time to go back to your support group and use them to spiritually nourish you so that you will be able to keep your stand. Keep working the program that got you ready to set your boundaries.

Countermoves to your boundary setting are tough to battle. But God will be there to match your efforts as you **"work out your salvation."**

Physical Resistance

It is sad that this section has to be included. But some people can't maintain their boundaries with another person because they are physically overpowered. Abusive spouses and boyfriends will not take no for an answer; often women who try to set limits are physically abused.

These abused individuals need help. They are often afraid to tell anyone about what has happened, or what is continuing to happen, for many reasons. They are trying to protect their spouse's reputation with friends or the church. They are afraid to admit that they allow this treatment. They are often afraid that they will get beaten worse if they tell. They must realize the

seriousness of the problem and get outside help. The problem will not go away, and it could get a lot worse.

If you are in this situation, find other people to help you set limits on the abuse. Find a counselor who has dealt with abusive spouses before. Arrange to call people in your church if your spouse or friend gets violent. Arrange for a place to stay overnight if you are threatened, no matter what the hour. Call the police and an attorney. Get a restraining order on such an individual if he will respect no other limit. Do it for yourself and for your children. Do not allow this to go on. Seek help!

Pain of Others

When we begin to set boundaries with people we love, a really hard thing happens: they hurt. They may feel a hole where you used to plug up their aloneness, their disorganization, or their financial irresponsibility. Whatever it is, they will feel a loss.

If you love them, this will be difficult for you to watch. But, when you are dealing with someone who is hurting, remember that your boundaries are both necessary for you and helpful for them. If you have been enabling them to be irresponsible, set them free today.

Blamers

Blamers will act as though your saying no is killing them, and they will react with a "How could you do this to me?" message. They are likely to cry, pout, or get angry. Remember that blamers have a character flaw. If they make it sound as though their misery is because of

your not giving something to them, they are blaming and demanding what is yours. This is very different from a humble person asking out of need. Listen to the nature of other people's complaints; if they are trying to blame you for something they should take responsibility for, confront them.

Susan had to confront her brother, who wanted her to lend him money to get a new car. They were both adults. She was responsible and worked hard; he was irresponsible and never saved enough of what he made. For years he hit her up for loans; for years, she forked over the money. He seldom paid her back.

Finally, she saw the light and said no to his latest request. He responded as though she had ruined his life. He said that he would not be able to advance in his career "because of her," because he could never attract business unless he had a new car. He said that he would not be able to get dates "because of her" with his old car.

Having learned to hear the blame, she confronted him. She said that she was sorry his career was not going well but his career was his problem. These responses were good for her and good for him.

Real Needs

You may need to set boundaries on people in real need. If you are a loving person, it will break your heart to say no to someone you love who is in need. But there are limits to what you can and can't give; you need to say no appropriately.

Remember the story of Moses impending burnout in Exodus 18. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, saw all that he was doing for the people and told Moses to delegate some of the work so that he could better meet the needs of the people.

Learn what your limits are, give what you have "decided in your heart" to give, and send other people in need to those who can help them. Empathize with these people's situations. They often need to know that you see their needs as valid and that they really do need help. And pray for them. This is the most loving thing you can do for the pain and needs around you that you can't meet.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Many people have a problem determining the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. They fail to deal with external resistance because they feel that they have to give in to the other person again or they are not being forgiving. In fact, many people are afraid to forgive because they equate that with letting down their boundaries one more time and giving the other person the power to hurt them again.

The Bible is clear about two principles: (1) We always need to forgive, but (2) we don't always achieve reconciliation. Forgiveness is something that we do in our hearts; we release someone from a debt that they owe us. We write off the person's debt, and she no longer owes us. We no longer condemn him. He is clean. Only one party is needed for forgiveness: me. The person who owes me a debt does not have to ask my forgiveness. It is a work of grace in my heart.

This brings us to the second principle: we do not always achieve reconciliation. God forgave the world, but the whole world is not reconciled to him. Although He may have forgiven all people, all people have not owned their sin and appropriated His forgiveness. That would be reconciliation. **Forgiveness takes one; reconciliation takes two.**

You need to clearly communicate that, while you have forgiven him, you do not trust him yet, for he has not proven himself trustworthy. There has not been enough time to see if he really is going to change.

Remember, God is your model. He did not wait for people to change their behavior before he stopped condemning them. He is finished condemning, but that does not mean that He has a relationship with all people. People must choose to own up to their sin and repent, then God will open Himself to them. Reconciliation involves two. Do not think that because you have forgiven that you have to reconcile. You can offer reconciliation, but it must be contingent upon the other person owning his behavior and bringing forth trustworthy fruit.

Internal Resistances

We have to have good boundaries, not only externally, as we have seen in the last section, but also internally, to say no to the flesh as it wants to, have dominion over us. Let's look at boundaries in regard to our internal resistance to growth.

Human Needs

God has designed us with very specific needs from the family we grew up in. We have talked about these before and have written extensively about them elsewhere. When we have unmet needs, we need to take inventory of these broken places inside and begin to have those needs met in the Body of Christ so that we will be strong enough to fight the boundary fights of adult life.

You will be amazed how much can change in your life when you finally begin to let go of what you can never have. All of your attempts to preserve the old life were taking a lot of energy and opening you up to a lot of abuse and control. Letting go is the way to serenity. Grief is the path. Grieve it and leave it.

Internal Fears of Anger

Three partners of a management team of one company were working on a big project with another company. In the course of negotiations, the president of the other company got very angry with the trio because they wouldn't do something he wanted them to do.

Two of the three partners lost sleep, worried, and fretted about the breakdown of negotiations; they wondered what they would do if the president of the other company no longer liked them. They finally called a meeting with the third partner to talk about a strategy. They were prepared to change all of their plans to appease the angry man. When the two told their third partner of their plans to "give away the store," he just looked at them and said, "What's the big deal? So he's angry. What else is on the agenda?"

They all began to laugh as they saw how silly they were

being. They were acting like children with an angry parent, as if their psychological survival depended on this president's being happy.

Each of the two partners who had feared the anger of the other man came from homes where anger was used to control; the third partner had never been exposed to that tactic. As a result, the latter had good boundaries. They elected him to meet with the president of the other company. He confronted the man, saying that if he was able to get over his anger and wanted to work with them, fine. But if not, they would go somewhere else.

It was a good lesson. The first two looked at the man from a dependent child's perspective. They acted like he was the only person in the world that they could depend on, and so anger frightened them. The third partner saw it from an adult's eyes and knew if the president of the company could not get his act together, they could move on.

The problem was internal for two of the three partners. The same angry man got two different responses. The first two resisted setting limits; the third did not. The determining factor was inside the man with the boundary skills, not with the angry man.

If angry people can make you lose your boundaries, you probably have an angry person in your head that you still fear. You will need to work through some of the hurt you experienced in that angry past. A hurt, frightened part of you needs to be exposed to the light and the healing of God and His people. You need love to allow you to let go of that angry parent and stand up to the adults you now face.

Here are the steps you need to take:

1. Realize it is a problem.
2. Go talk to someone about your paralysis. You should not work this out alone.
3. In your support relationships, find the source of your fear and begin to recognize the person in your head that the angry person represents.
4. Talk out your hurts and feelings regarding these past issues.
5. Practice the boundary-setting skills in this message.
6. Don't go into automatic pilot and give up your boundaries either by fighting or by being passive. Give yourself time and space until you can respond. If you need physical distance, get it. But don't give up your boundaries.
7. When you are ready, respond. Stick to self-control statements. Stick to your decisions. Just reiterate what you will do or not do, and let them be angry. Tell them that you care for them; maybe ask if you can do anything else to help. But your **no** still stands.
8. Regroup. Talk to your support people about the interaction and see if you kept your ground, lost ground, or were attacking. Many times you will feel mean when you were not, and you may need a reality check on that. You may have thought that you kept your boundaries when you actually gave them away. Get feedback.

9. Keep practicing. Role play, continue to gain insight and understanding about the past, and grieve your losses Continue to gain skills in the present. After a while, you will think, "I remember when angry people could control me. But I've dealt with the things inside that allowed that. It's nice to be free." Remember, God does not want angry people to control you. He wants to be your master, and does not want to share you with anyone. He is on your side.

Fear of the Unknown

Another powerful internal resistance to setting and maintaining boundaries is the fear of the unknown. Being controlled by others is a safe prison. We know where all the rooms are. As one woman said, "I didn't want to move out of hell. I knew the names of all the streets!"

Setting boundaries and being more independent is scary because it is a step into the unknown. The Bible has many stories about people called by God out of the familiar to an unknown land. And he promises them if they will step out on faith and live His way, He will lead them to a better land. **"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Heb. 11:8).**

Boundaries separate you from what you have known and what you do not want. They open up all sorts of new options for you. You will have mixed emotions as you let go of the old and familiar and venture out into the new. Think for a moment about the new and frightening developmental boundary steps that have opened up

bigger and better worlds for you. As a two-year-old you stepped away from your mom and dad to explore the world. As a five-year-old you left home to go to school, opening up possibilities of socialization and learning. As an adolescent, you stepped further away from your parents as new competencies and possibilities emerged. As a high school graduate, you left for college or got a job and learned to live on your own.

These steps are scary indeed. But, along with the fear, you stretched to new heights, possibilities, and realizations of God, yourself, and the world. This is the two-sided nature of setting limits. You may lose something, but you gain a new life of peacefulness and self-control.

Unforgiveness

"To err is human, to forgive is divine." And to not forgive is the most stupid thing we can do.

Forgiveness is very hard. It means letting go of something that someone "owes" you. Forgiveness is freedom from the past; it is freedom from the abusive person who hurt you.

The Bible compares forgiving people to releasing them from a legal debt. When a debt is incurred, when people trespass on your personal property, real "owing" occurs. You have on the "books" of your soul an accounting of who owes you what. Your mother controlled you and owes you to make it right. Your father dominated you and owes you to make it right. If you are "under the law," you are motivated to collect these debts from them.

Attempts at collection may take many forms. You may try to please them to help them pay you back. You think that if you do a little something more, they will pay their bill and give you the love they owe. Or you may think that if you confront them enough, they will see their wrong and make it right. Or you may feel that if you convince enough people of how bad you've had it and how bad your parents were, that will somehow clear the account. Or you could "take it out" on someone else, repeating the sin they did to you on someone else—or on them — to even the score. Or you could continue to try and convince them of how bad they are. You think that if they just understood, they would make it better. They would pay what they owe.

Nothing is wrong with wanting things to be resolved. The problem is that things will get resolved in only one way: with grace and forgiveness. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth does not work. The wrong can never be undone. But it can be forgiven and thereby rendered powerless.

To forgive means to write it off. Let it go. Tear up the account. It is to render the account "canceled." **"Having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14).**

To forgive means we will never get from that person what was owed us. And that is what we do not like, because that involves grieving for what will never be: The past will not be different.

For some, this means grieving the childhood that never was. For others it means other things, but to hang on to

the demand is to stay in unforgiveness, and that is the most destructive thing we can do to ourselves.

Warning: Forgiveness and opening up to more abuse are not the same thing. Forgiveness has to do with the past. Reconciliation and boundaries have to do with the future. Limits guard my property until someone has repented and can be trusted to visit again. And if they sin, I will forgive again, seventy times seven. But do I want to be around people who honestly fail me, dishonestly deny that they have hurt me and have no intent to do better. That is destructive for me and for them. If people are owning their sin, they are learning through failure. We can ride that out. They want to be better, and forgiveness will help. But if someone is in denial, or only giving lip service to getting better, without trying to make changes, or seeking help, I need to keep my boundaries, even though I have forgiven them.

Forgiveness gives me boundaries because it unhooks me from the hurtful person, and then I can act responsibly, wisely. If I am not forgiving them, I am still in a destructive relationship with them.

Unforgiveness destroys boundaries. Forgiveness creates them, for it gets bad debt off of your property.

Remember one last thing. Forgiveness is not denial. You must name the sin against you to forgive it. God did not deny what we did to Him. He worked through it. He named it. He expressed His feelings about it. He cried and was angry. And then He let it go. And He did this in the context of relationship. Within the Trinity, He was never alone. Go and do the same. And watch out for the

resistance that will want you to stay in the past, trying to collect what will never be.

External Focus

People tend to look outside of themselves for the problem. This external perspective keeps you a victim. It says that you can never be okay until someone else changes. This is the essence of powerless blame. It may make you morally superior to that person (in your own thinking, never in reality), but it will never fix the problem.

Face squarely the resistance to looking at yourself as the one who has to change. It is crucial that you face yourself, for that is the beginning of getting healed. Responsibility begins with an internal focus of confession and repentance. You must confess the truth about the ways you are keeping your boundarylessness going, and you must turn from those ways. **You must look at yourself and face the internal resistance of wanting the problem to be on the outside of you.**

Guilt

Guilt is a difficult emotion, for it is really not a true feeling, such as sadness, anger, or fear. It is a state of internal condemnation. It is the punitive nature of our fallen conscience saying, "You are bad." It is the state of our mind that Jesus died for. He died to put us into a state of "no condemnation." Biblically, it is something legal, not emotional.

Scripture teaches that we are to be out from under the law. That there is no longer any condemnation.

Guilt comes mainly from how we have been taught in our early socialization process. Therefore, our guilt feelings are not always rational. They can appear when we have not done anything wrong at all, but have violated some internal standard that we have been taught. We have to be careful about listening to guilt feelings to tell us when we are wrong, for often, the guilt feelings themselves are wrong. In addition, guilt feelings are not good motivators anyway. It is hard to love from a condemned place. We need to feel not condemned, so that we can feel "godly sorrow" that looks at the hurt we have caused someone else, instead of how "bad" we are. Guilt distorts reality, gets us away from the truth, and away from doing what is best for the other person.

This is particularly true when it comes to setting limits. We have seen over and over in this message how the Bible tells us to have good boundaries, to enforce consequences, to set limits, to grow up and separate from families of origin, and to say **no. When we do these things, we are doing right. These boundaries are loving actions to take. Even though they are painful, they are helpful to others.**

But our fallen nature (that carnal part of us) can tell us that we are bad or doing something mean when we set limits. The people with whom we are setting boundaries will often say things to reinforce our guilty consciences. If you have been raised in a family that said implicitly or explicitly that your limits are bad, you know what I am talking about. When you say **no to a request, you feel guilty. When you do not allow someone to take advantage of you, you feel guilty. When you separate from the family to create a life of your own, you feel guilty. If you do not rescue someone who is irrespon-**

sible, you feel guilty. The list goes on.

Guilt will keep you from doing what is right and will keep you **stuck**. Many people do not have good boundaries because they are afraid of disobeying the internal parent inside their heads. Many people without boundaries complain about how "so and so makes me feel guilty when I say no," as if the other person had some sort of power over them. This fantasy comes from childhood, when your parents seemed so powerful.

No one has the power to **"make you feel guilty."** A part of you agrees with the message because it taps into strong parental messages in your emotional brain. And that is your problem; it is on your property, and you must gain control over it. See that being manipulated is your problem, and you will be able to master it.

There are several steps you can take to avoid this guilt, but you must begin with one fact - the guilt is your problem.

1. Own the guilt.
2. Get into your support system.
3. Begin to examine where the guilt messages come from.
4. Become aware of your anger.
5. Forgive the controller.
6. Set boundaries in practice situations with your supportive friends, then gradually set them in more difficult situations. This will help you to gain strength as well as gain the supportive "voices" you need to **rework** your subconscious mind.

7. Learn new information for your conscience. This is where reading material like this and reading what God says about your boundaries will give you **new** information that will become the **new** guiding structures in your head instead of the old voices. Learning God's ways can restore your soul and make your heart rejoice instead of feeling that controlling, parental guilt.

8. Acquire guilt. **That may sound funny**, but you are going to have to disobey your parental subconscious to get well. You are going to have to do some things that are right but make you feel guilty. Do not let the guilt be your master any longer. Set limits and then get with your **new** supporters to let them help you with the guilt.

9. Stay in your support group. Guilt is not resolved by just retraining your mind. You need the **new** connections to internalize new voices in your head.

10. Do not be surprised by grief. This will be sad, but let others love you in that process. Mourners can be comforted.

Remember the developmental section we discussed earlier that boundaries come after bonding. God designed the learning process this way. Babies must be secure before they learn to set limits so that learning separateness will not be frightening, but new and exciting. Children who have good connections naturally begin to set limits and move away from others. They have enough love inside to risk setting limits and gaining independence.

But if one does not have secure bonding, setting limits is too frightening. Many people stay in destructive

relationships because they fear abandonment. They fear that if they stand up for themselves, they will be all alone in the world. They would rather have no boundaries and some connection than have boundaries and be all alone.

Boundaries are not built in a vacuum. They must be undergirded by strong bonding to safe people, or they will fail. If you have a good support group to go to after setting limits with someone you love, you will not be alone.

Being "rooted and grounded" in love in the Body of Christ and with God will be the developmental fuel you need to risk boundary setting. People often vacillate between compliance and isolation. Neither is healthy or sustainable for very long.

If It Were Easy, You Would Have Done It By Now

This section is about trouble, the kind Jesus warned about. "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). When you begin to do things Jesus' way, you will encounter troubles—from both outside and inside. The world, the devil, and even your own flesh will resist you and pressure you to do it the wrong way. But the wrong way is not working. To do it right will be difficult, but He warned us about that. "**Narrow is the road that leads to life**" (Matt. 7:14). To hammer out a godly identity takes a lot of courage and a lot of work. But we are up to the challenge.

Running into resistance is a good sign that you are doing what you need to do. It will be worth it. Remember

the clear message of the Scriptures: when you encounter resistances, persevering to the end will bring great reward, "receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (I Peter 1:9). As James puts it, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4).

These resistances will surely come. I promise you. If they didn't come, you would have established limits a long time ago. But as they come, see them in their biblical perspective. They are part of a long history of your sisters and brothers-people who have encountered many trials as they ventured out on the road of faith, seeking a better land. This journey is always riddled with trouble, but also with the promises of our Shepherd to carry us through if we do our part. Go for it.

Successful Boundaries

Specific, orderly changes signal the emerging of mature boundaries. It's helpful to be aware of them. The following eleven steps allow you to measure your growth—to see where you are in your development. Use this section as a guide to the next step in your growth.

Step #1: Resentment—Our Early-Warning Signal

One of the first signs that you're beginning to develop boundaries is a sense of resentment, frustration, or anger at the subtle and not-so-subtle violations in your life. Just as radar signals an approach of a foreign missile, your anger can alert you to boundary violations in your life.

This early warning light, when functioning properly, should turn on quickly when you are being attacked. The Bible describes anger in terms of heat: "Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses" (Exod. 4:14); "Therefore the Lord's anger burned against this land" (Deut. 29:27). Anger is like a fire that shoots up within your heart, letting you know there's a problem to confront.

So before you say anything confrontive, even before you set that first boundary, examine your heart. Ask yourself, "Do I have permission to feel angry when I'm controlled by others? Am I aware when I'm being violated? Can I hear my early-warning signal?" If so, you're on the right track. If not, this is a good time to work on finding a safe place to tell the truth. As you are better able to be honest about differences and

disagreements, you will be better able to allow your anger to help you in this early stage.

Step #2: A Change of Tastes—Becoming Drawn to Boundary-Lovers

People with immature limit-setting abilities often find themselves involved with "boundary-busters." These may be family members, colleagues, spouses, church members, or friends. The boundary confusion seems normal to them—so they aren't very aware of the destruction it causes for themselves and others.

As boundary-injured individuals begin developing their own boundaries, however, a change occurs. They become attracted to people who can hear their **no** without being critical. Without getting hurt. Without personalizing it. Without running over their boundaries in a manipulative or controlling fashion. People who will simply say, "Okay—we'll miss you. See you next time."

The reason for this shift is hidden in the way we have been constructed by God. We were created free for one basic purpose: to love, to be meaningfully close to God and to others: "**And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity**" (Col. 3:14). This fundamental truth underscores the deepest parts of our hearts. And when we find relationships in which we have freedom to set limits, something wonderful happens. In addition to the freedom to say **no**, we find the freedom to say a wholehearted, unconflicted, gratitude-driven **yes** to others. We become attracted to boundary lovers, because in them, we find permission to be honest, authentic, loving individuals.

To a boundary-injured person, people who can say a clear no sometimes seem curt and cold. But as the boundaries become more firm, curt and cold people change into caring, refreshingly honest people.

We need to join with boundary lovers in deep, meaningful attachments. Boundaries can't develop in a vacuum. As we make connections involving asking for support and understanding with these people, God gives us, through them, the grace and power to do the hard work of limit setting. This drawing to boundaried individuals extends to God. Some people will begin finding out that the Holy, just God about whom they read in the Old Testament isn't so bad or scary. He just has very clear boundaries.

Step #3: Joining the Family

As we find our tastes changing, from boundary-muddled relationships to more clearly defined people, we begin developing close and meaningful connections with people who have clear boundaries. We begin either growing in boundaries in our present relationships, or finding new attachments in which to invest, or both. This is a crucial phase in boundary development.

Why is it so important to join the boundaried family? Mainly because as with any spiritual discipline, boundaries can't be worked on in a vacuum. We need others with the same biblical values of limit setting and responsibility to encourage us, practice with us, and stay with us. That's what Wayne, a former co-worker of mine discovered.

Wayne couldn't believe the change. Over the past few

months, he'd become aware of his lack of boundaries at work. While other employees went home on time, he was frequently asked to stay later. He wanted to stand up to his boss and let him know that his work limits were going to become tighter and more realistic. But every time he approached his superior, his anxiety kept him tongue-tied and silent.

Wayne despaired of ever developing mature work boundaries. About this time, he joined a support group at church. His relationships in the group deepened, and he began to trust the members. Finally, he was able to **emotionally** "take them with him" to work the day he sat down with his boss and worked out the overtime conflict. It was the safety and support of the group that gave Wayne the strength he needed to tell the truth at work.

Jesus defined fellowship as two or three people gathered in His name, saying that He would be there in their midst (Matt. 18:20). It is this very combination of His Spirit and the emotional memories of those who believe in us that helps us keep firm boundaries. Why? Because we know we have a spiritual and emotional home somewhere. No matter how caustic the criticism, or how severe the rejection of the one we're in conflict with, we aren't alone. And that makes all the difference in the world in boundary setting.

Step #4: Treasuring Our Treasures

After you feel safe being around people who believe that grace and truth are good (John 1:17), your values will start to change. You will begin to see that taking responsibility for yourself is healthy, and you will begin

to understand that taking responsibility for other adults is destructive.

When people are treated as objects for long enough, they see themselves as someone else's property. They don't value self-stewardship because they relate to themselves the same way that significant others have related to them. Many people are told over and over again that nurturing and maintaining their souls is selfish and wrong. After a while, they develop a deep conviction that this is true. And at that point, they place little value on taking care of the feelings, talents, thoughts, attitudes, behavior, body, and resources God entrusted to them.

This principle is taught in Scripture: **"We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19)**. In other words, we learn to be loving because we are loved. Grace must come from the outside for us to be able to develop it inside. The opposite side of this truth is that we can't love when we aren't loved. And, taking the thinking further, we can't value or treasure our souls when they haven't been valued or treasured.

This is a key principle. Our basic sense of ourselves, of what is real and true about us, comes from our significant, primary relationships. That's why many people who were unloved in childhood can be inundated by caring people in their adult years, yet not be able to shake a deep sense of being worthless and unloveable, no matter how much people try to show them their lovability.

Helen's father sexually abused her in her early years. She was terribly traumatized by the molestation, but

tried to keep the secret and protect the family from being upset. By her teenage years, however, Helen inadvertently began to "tell the truth" about her family problem, in nonverbal ways. She became sexually promiscuous at a very early age.

As an adult, Helen shared with me her tumultuous teen years. "I can't even remember the boys' faces. All I knew was that someone wanted something from me, and I felt it was my duty to give it to them-for no other reason than that they wanted it! I felt that I had no say-so in the matter."

Helen had not been treasured by one of the people who should have treasured and cherished her most. As a result, she did not treasure herself. She provided sexual services to just about anyone who requested them. She had no sense that her body and feelings were a "pearl of great value" (Matt. 13:46), given to her by God, which she was to protect and develop.

When **Christians** begin to value getting well, recovering, and developing themselves into the image of God (all of which are different ways of saying the same thing), a shift occurs. They begin desiring a return on God's investment! (remember the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30). Taking care of themselves becomes important.

Steve and I were members of the same prayer group at church. He walked up to me excitedly one day. As he wasn't given to emotional outbursts, I knew something important was going on. He showed me his Bible, where he had been reading **I Corinthians 8:11: "So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge."**

"Something is happening inside of me," he said. "For years, I felt guilty about reading this passage. I thought it was condemning me for leading weaker Christians into sin."

"Well, it does say that," I replied. "But you've noticed something else."

"I have," said Steve. "I'm seeing that I'm also a 'brother for whom Christ died. That means I need to be as careful and concerned about myself as I am about others. There's no difference between what God thinks of him and what God thinks of me."

Steve had realized an important biblical point. For years, Christians have been taught that protecting their spiritual and emotional property is selfish. Yet God is interested in people loving others, and you can't love others unless you have received love inside yourself.

Have you had Steve's experience? Is getting help and learning self-protection and biblical boundaries important to you? If it isn't, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to go through the hard work of developing good limits. You may need to spend some time around people who have a mature understanding of healthy boundaries and learn from their modeling.

This principle is illustrated when the psalmist says, **"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Prov. 4:23)**. When we "watch over" our hearts (the home of our treasures), we guard them. We are to value our treasures so much that we keep them protected. Whatever we don't value, we don't guard. The security around a bank is significantly tighter than that around a junkyard.

Begin a list of your "treasures": your time, money, feelings, and beliefs. How do you want others to treat them? How do you want others to not treat them?

Step #5: Practicing Baby No's

I participated in a self help workshop at church about five years ago. During one of the sessions the instructor asked us to mention to a group member one thing that had rubbed us the wrong way in the past few sessions. Shirley who sat next to me was terrified; she had never intentionally spoken negatively to anyone in her entire life. At first she said nothing, obviously gathering up courage. Then, slowly, she turned to the woman sitting on the other side of her and said, "Carolyn, I don't know how to say this, but here goes. It bothers me when you always take the good chair at our sessions." Quickly, she ducked her head, waiting for the rebuttal.

There was none, at least not what Shirley had expected.

"I've been waiting for you to say something," Carolyn explained. "I knew you were acting distant toward me, but I didn't know why. It helps to know, and I feel closer to you now. You took a risk to confront me. Who knows-I may even arm wrestle you for the chair!"

Does this sound trivial? It isn't. Given her family background of a mother who made her feel guilty for setting limits and a father who had rage attacks when she dared disagree, Shirley was taking a genuine plunge. For her, boundaries were out of the question until her anxiety and depression sent her life out of control. That's why the best possible place for Shirley to begin her boundary work was in the Body of Christ.

Growth in setting emotional boundaries must always be at a rate that takes into account your past injuries. Otherwise, you could fail massively before you have solid enough boundaries.

"This saying 'no' doesn't work," complained Frank who was in this same workshop. "Why not?" The instructor asked.

"Well, as soon as I understood that I don't set good limits with people, I called my father the same day and gave him what for. Can you believe what he did? He hung up on me! This is great, just great. Setting limits have made things worse for me, instead of better."

Frank is like the overeager child who is too impatient for training wheels on his new bicycle. It's only several falls and skinned knees later that he begins to entertain the possibility that he skipped some steps in his training.

Here's an idea to help you navigate this step. Ask your support group or your good friends if you could work on boundaries with them. They will show you their true value in their response to your truth-telling. Either they'll warmly cheer you on in being able to disagree with and confront them, or they'll resist you. Either way, you'll learn something. A good supportive relationship cherishes the no of all parties involved. The members know that true intimacy is only built around the freedom to disagree: **"He who conceals his hatred has lying lips" (Prov. 10:18). Begin practicing your **no** with people who will honor it and love you for it.**

Step #6: Rejoicing in the Guilty Feelings

As strange as it may seem, a sign that you're becoming a boundary person is often a sense of self-condemnation, a sense that you transgressed some important rules in your limit setting. Many people experience intense critical self-judgment when they begin telling the truth about what is and isn't their biblical responsibility. Why is that? Let's look at the answer in terms of slavery and freedom.

Boundary-injured individuals are slaves. They struggle to make value-based decisions on their own, but they most often reflect the wishes of those around them. And even though they can be surrounded by supportive boundary lovers, they still experience trouble setting limits.

The culprit here is a weak conscience, or an overactive and unbiblically harsh internal judge (subconscious mind). Though we need our internal "evaluator" to help us know right from wrong, many people carry around an extremely self-critical and inaccurate subconscious. They feel that they are transgressing when they aren't.

Because of this overactive judge, the boundary-injured individual often has great difficulty setting limits. Questions such as, "Aren't you being too harsh?" and "How can you not attend the party? What a selfish thought!" are raised.

You can imagine the havoc when the struggler actually sets a limit or two, even a small one. The subconscious moves into overdrive, as its unrealistic demands are being disobeyed. This rebellion against honest boundaries is a threat to the parental control of the subconscious. It attacks the soul with vigor, hoping to

beat the person into submitting again to its untruthful do's and don'ts.

In a funny way, then, activating the hostile subconscious is a sign of spiritual growth. A signal that you may be protesting unbiblical restraints. If the subconscious were silent and providing no "how could you?" guilt-inducing messages, it might mean that you were remaining enslaved to the internal parent. That's why I encourage you to rejoice in the guilt. It means you are moving ahead. The guilt won't last long.

Step #7: Practicing Grownup No's

Think for a minute about this question: Who is your number-one "boundary buster"? Who is the foremost person in your life with whom it's difficult to set limits? More than one person may come to mind. This step deals with those extremely complicated, conflictual, frightening relationships. Straightening out these relationships is a major goal in becoming a boundaried person.

The fact that this is the seventh, and not the second, step underscores the importance of making sure we've done our painstaking homework and practice before now. Setting important limits with significant people is the fruit of much work and maturing.

It's important not to confuse our goals here. Often, Christians who have been boundary injured think that the objective is to set limits on those important areas, and get life stabilized again. They may be living for the day when "I can tell Mom no." Or when "I can set limits on my husband's drinking." While these sorts of

confrontations are very important (Jesus spoke of them in Matthew 18:15-20), they aren't the ultimate target of learning boundaries.

Our real target is maturity-the ability to love successfully and work successfully, the way God does. This is the goal of becoming more like Christ: **“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”** (1 John 3:2)

Boundary setting is a large part of maturing. We can't really love until we have boundaries-otherwise we love out of compliance or guilt. And we can't really be productive at work without limits; otherwise we're so busy following others' agendas that we're doubleminded and unstable (James 1:8). The goal is to have a character structure that has boundaries and that can set limits on self and others at the appropriate times. Having internal boundaries results in having boundaries in the world: **“For as he thinks within himself, so he is”** (Prov. 23:7).

Developing a well-defined, honest, and goal-oriented character structure produces this step. By this time, those frightening major **no's** have been prepared for over time, with lots of work and practice.

Sometimes the large **no** will precipitate a crisis. Someone important to you will get angry. Or hurt. Or abusive. The truth will expose the divisions in relationships. The conflicts and disagreements already exist. Setting limits simply bring them out to the surface.

Prayerfully make a list of your significant relationships. Now add to that what specific treasures are being violated in these relationships. What specific limits need to be set to protect these treasures?

Step #8: Rejoicing in the Absence of Guilty Feelings

Step #6 involved understanding that your first steps into a boundaried existence will most likely be met by the harsh resistance of an overactive and weak conscience. With consistent work and good support, however, the guilt diminishes. We become more able to "keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9).

You can take this step now that you have shifted allegiance spiritually and emotionally. You have changed from listening to your internal parent to responding to the biblical values of love, responsibility, and forgiveness. And these values have been internalized in the heart by many, many relational experiences with people who understand these values. The heart has somewhere to go for self-evaluation besides a critical subconscious. The heart rests in the emotional memories of loving, truthful people.

Evelyn knew something was different inside when she confronted her husband on his critical tirades. "That's it, Paul," she said, without raising her voice. "If you're not using a civil voice with me in ten seconds, I'll be spending the evening at my friend Nan's house. Make your choice, because I'm not bluffing."

Paul, ready to launch another verbal attack, closed his mouth. He, too, sensed that Evelyn was serious this

time. He sat down on the couch and waited for her next move.

What surprised Evelyn was the absence of her self-recriminations after setting limits. Usually, she would say to herself, "You didn't give Paul enough chances," or "You've just got to stop being so thin-skinned," or "But he works hard and he's good with the kids."

Her church group had worked. Her practicing had paid off. And her subconscious had begun mature.

Step #9: Loving the Boundaries of Others

If we expect others to respect our boundaries, we need to respect theirs for several reasons.

Loving others' boundaries confronts our selfishness and omnipotence. When we are concerned about protecting the treasures of others, we work against the self-centeredness that is part of our fallen nature. We become more other-centered.

Loving others' boundaries increases our capacity to care about others. It isn't difficult to love the agreeable aspects of others. It's another story, however, when we encounter another's resistance, confrontation, or separateness. We may find ourselves in conflict, or not getting something we might want from the other.

When we can love and respect the boundaries of others, we accomplish two things. First, we genuinely care for another person because we gain nothing by helping someone tell us no. It just helps him or her deprive us better!

The second advantage in loving others' boundaries is that it teaches us empathy. It shows us that we need to treat others as we would like to be treated: "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (Gal. 5:14). We should fight for the **no** of others just as we should fight for our own **no**-even if it costs us something.

Step #10: Freeing Our No and Our Yes

Think for a second about the last time you were asked for something from someone. Perhaps it was for some of your time that you weren't sure you had to give. Suppose the person asking is not selfish, manipulative, or controlling. Reasonable people can make reasonable requests sometimes.

So you were asked for something you weren't sure you had left over to give. You weren't sure you could do it with a "cheerful heart" (I Cor. 9:7). What happened next is what this particular step is all about. You probably did one of two things:

- 1. Since you were unsure, you said yes.**
- 2. Since you were unsure, you said no.**

Which is the more mature of these? In most cases, the second. Why? Because it is more responsible to give out of our resources than to promise that which we might not be able to deliver. Jesus said that we are to "calculate the cost" of our endeavors.

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the

foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him.” (Luke 14:28-30)

Boundary-injured individuals make promises and then do one of two things: (1) They resentfully make good, or (2) they fail on the promise. Boundary-developed people, however, make good freely and gladly. Or they don't promise at all.

Following up on guilt-ridden or compliant responsibilities can be quite costly, painful, and inconvenient. The lesson you need to learn is not to promise too much before you have done your spiritual and emotional calculations.

Step #11: Mature Boundaries— Value-Driven Goal Setting

But does life interrupt the process of the person with mature boundaries? Won't there be trials, complications, and people wanting me on their track and not God's? Absolutely.

There will be all sorts of resistances to our boundaries and goals.

But the person with mature limits understands that, makes room for that, allows for that. And he or she knows that, should it be needed, a no is waiting inside the heart- ready to use. Not for an attack. Not to punish another. But to protect and develop the time, talents, and treasures that God has allocated to us during our threescore and ten years on this planet (Ps. 90:10).

CHANGE

(Options)

Everyone has God-given dreams, interests, and passions. Often they will help you decide between options. You may have artistic talent, for instance, but the solitary, precarious life of a painter just doesn't appeal to you. However you may thrive as an interior decorator or be completely energized helping a group of children paint murals on the walls of the church nursery.

If you're still struggling to get a handle on what your area of strength may be, the following list may help. Look over the twelve statements below, and circle the ones that ring true for you:

1. You love playing with words and excel in speaking and writing.
2. You get excited by expressing yourself in artistic areas and may have been told you have artistic talent.
3. You love to organize and have a knack for bringing order to chaos.
4. You are a natural encourager and motivator.
5. You enjoy having people in your home and hostessing special events.

6. **You are energized by numbers and finances.**
7. **You find pleasure in expressing yourself musically.**
8. **You like to fix and repair things.**
9. **You are comfortable in leadership roles or people frequently look to you for direction.**
10. **You often find fulfillment behind the scenes, helping and serving.**
11. **You relish athletic challenges and hands-on activities.**
12. **You are drawn to research and problem solving.**

Do one or two of these descriptions seem to fit you? Do any of them catch your interest or call to you? If so, why not take the hint? Pick the one or two that feel most likely, focus on them, and start to dream of the incredible relief of working or volunteering in areas that really energize you.

CHANGE

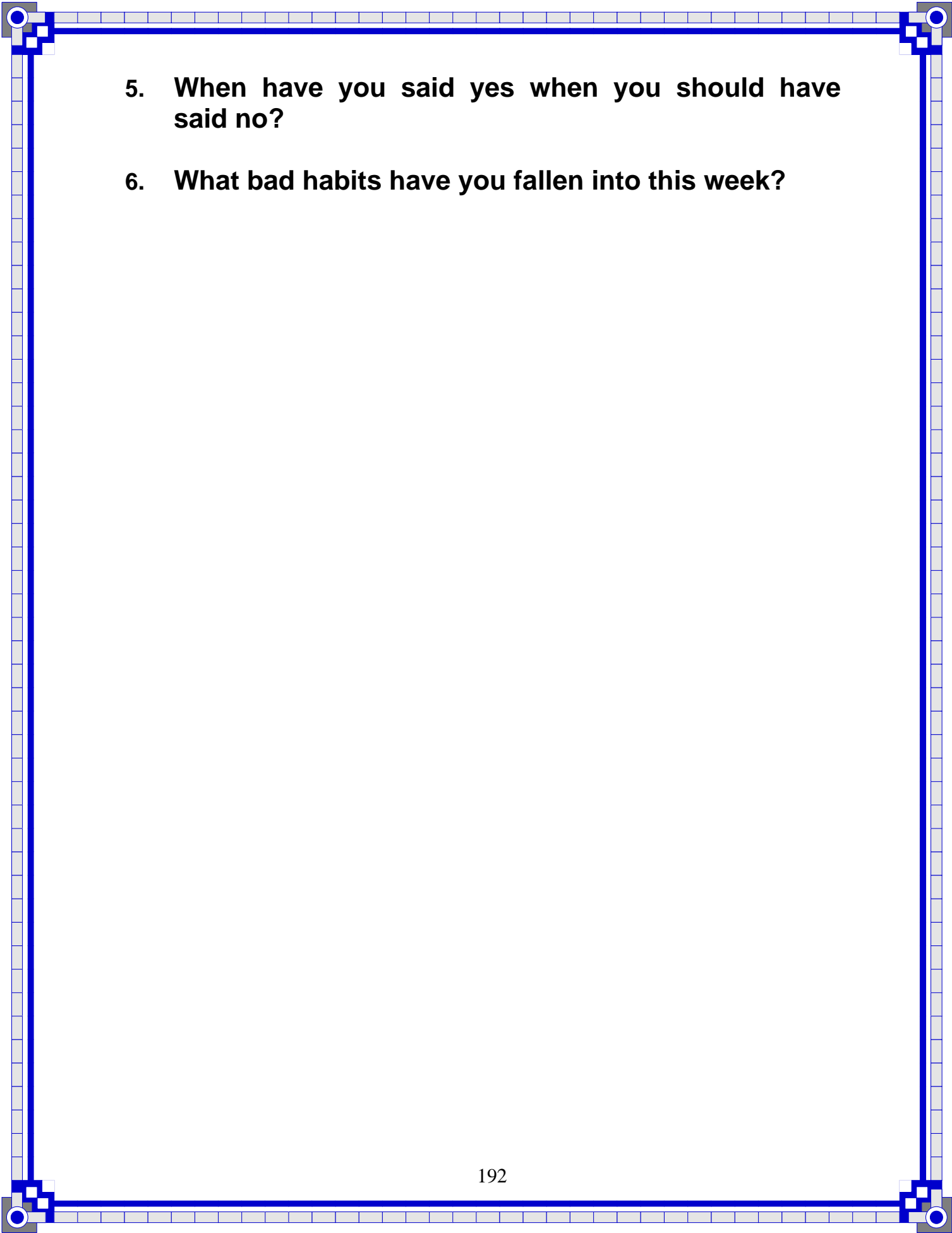
(Stress)

Let's face it: Stressed-out people can sometimes be our own worst enemies. We make choices that intensify our stress, then either brag about everything we are doing or bemoan how trapped and victimized we feel. Half the time, we're just distracted and confused. And even when we commit to reforming our stressed-out ways, we backslide very easily.

The more worn out you get, the more you need others to check out your thinking. A good mentor, accountability or bible study group can be a priceless asset. And if you're sure you don't have time to talk with someone in this way—that's a good sign you really need to!

To be accountable is to consent to being watched and questioned. You share with others what wears you out, letting them know those obvious and less obvious challenges that steal your energy. You also give them permission to ask questions:

- 1. How worn out are you?**
- 2. What area of stress are you in denial about?**
- 3. Who are you most concerned about and why?**
- 4. What do you use to emotionally escape?**

- 
5. **When have you said yes when you should have said no?**
 6. **What bad habits have you fallen into this week?**

CHANGE

(Worry)

Worry is an incredible drain for stressed-out people. Yet so many people just can't seem to stop worrying about their families, their jobs, their relationships, and their finances. No matter what our circumstances, most of us can usually find something to worry about.

Worry is not the same thing as being concerned about problems. We all have difficulties, and it's appropriate to be concerned enough to want to solve them. If we weren't concerned, we might never do anything to improve our lives. But worry, by definition, never improves anything. Worry is that continual rehearsal of what has gone wrong in your life or what **might** go wrong. It's stewing over what you can't change or regretting what you did or didn't do. And that is harmful because:

Worry feeds on itself. The more you worry, the more you can usually find to worry about.

Worry gets you stuck emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically. Instead of taking steps to move forward, you get caught in a cycle of buts and what its.

Worry steals your joy because it undermines your trust in God and distances you from Him.

Worry hurts your relationships, especially if it pushes you to nag or complain.

Worry drains your energy. It either speeds you up pushing you to do more and more to head off frightening possibilities. Or it can shut you down, paralyzing you with fear and anxiety. Either way it siphons off energy you could be using to solve your problems.

Worry robs you of peace. How can you feel peaceful or serene when your mind is full of anxiety?

Worry can actually make you sick. Chronic anxiety and worry have been linked to weakened immune systems, cardiovascular disease, neurological imbalance, and clinical depression, not to mention specific anxiety-related illnesses such as panic attacks.