

Sermon "Boundaries and Well-Being"

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes an astounding statement that, over the centuries, has led to an enormous amount of debate about his meaning.

Matthew 5:38-42

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' 39 "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.

Jesus says don't resist an evil person, and if someone asks for something, give it to him. Jesus says, don't resist and don't set limits on evil. Some of us have asked ourselves, "is this really what Jesus wants us to do?" Now, we find in Jesus' own life something very interesting. He does something opposite of what he says here in the Sermon on the Mount. Do you remember before Jesus went to the cross when Jesus was on trial before the High Priest and was struck by an officer and how he handled that? **John 18:23 tells us, Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?"**

Does this look like turning the other cheek to you? Instead of turning the other cheek, Jesus challenges the officer's strike. On another occasion, Jesus again teaches something opposite of turning the other cheek when he says in **Luke 17:3 "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.** Here again, rebuke doesn't sound like turning the other cheek, but instead resisting evil. We may wonder how we can reconcile Jesus' teaching in Luke 17 with what he said in the Sermon on the Mount about not resisting evil.

The answer is that Jesus is teaching two different responses to evil. Jesus provides wisdom for each of us to know how to respond to evil in each individual case that we encounter. Sometimes the wise response to evil is to turn the other cheek and let people have what they want, even when it seems unjust. Like when Jesus allowed himself to be crucified. At other times, the wise response to evil is to resist evil directly by setting limits on it. Of these two different responses, this morning we are going to focus on protecting ourselves from bad things and preserving good things by setting limits.

Another word for a limit is a boundary. Boundaries are lines that mark a limit, bound, or border. An example of a boundary in the physical world is a fence around a property. In the physical world, the fences are visible, but in the interpersonal world, the fences or boundaries are invisible. Just like in the physical world, in the interpersonal world, boundaries help us to distinguish our property so that we can take care of it. Among other things, our boundaries mark what we will allow and what we will not allow in our yard, that is, in our lives. Boundaries help us to keep the good in and the bad out. Boundaries help us to know when

to say “yes” and when to say “no.” Having healthy boundaries is vital for having quality relationships, which is an important area of growth for our church.

This message is the first of a three part series in which we are going to look at the topic of boundaries based on the best selling book “Boundaries” by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. Also, beginning next Sunday, Glenna is going to be teaching the adult Sunday School class on this topic to help you to further study and apply the principles of boundaries.

Boundaries are basically anything that helps to differentiate you from someone else. The most basic boundary that defines you is your physical skin. People often use their boundary of skin as a metaphor for saying that their interpersonal boundaries have been violated. They say, “He really gets under my skin.” Our skin boundary keeps the good in and the bad out. Our skin boundary keeps the germs outside, protecting us from infection. At the same time, skin has openings that let the good in, like food.

How can we create boundaries? We can create boundaries, with our words. The most basic boundary setting word is “no.” Many passages of Scripture urge us to say “no” to others’ sinful treatment of us such as we looked at earlier from Luke 17 when Jesus said, “if your brother sins, rebuke him.” The word “no” is a confrontational word. God wants us to confront people and say, “No, that behavior is not OK.” Can you think of someone in your life that you need to begin saying “no” to? Perhaps they are treating you in a disrespectful way, raising their voice at you, using profanity around you, not keeping their commitments to you, asking more than you have the resources to give. In those cases you can set a boundary by saying, “No, that behavior is not OK.” We can easily recognize the sin of the person who is mistreating us. But we are also sinning if we allow the mistreatment and we don’t set boundaries on their behavior. On the one hand, we need to set boundaries, on the other hand, perhaps you are in the opposite situation and you need to apologize to someone for violating his boundaries.

In addition to saying “no,” another boundary we can use is physical distance. We can physically remove ourselves in order to replenish ourselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually, after we have given to our limits. On some occasions (such as in Mark 6:30-32) Jesus left the crowds he ministered to, to be alone so that he could replenish himself.

We can also use the boundary of physical distance in order to avoid harm. This is referred to in **Proverbs 22:3 The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive go on, and are punished for it.** This Scripture shows that we can physically remove ourselves from a situation in order to set a boundary. We can physically remove ourselves from those who continue to hurt us and go to a safe place.

We have seen that boundaries help to keep the good in and the bad out. However, some of us have a different problem. We have bad on the inside and good on the outside. Those of us in this situation need to be able to open up our boundaries to let the bad out and let the good in. The way this happens is to have gates in the fences of our boundaries. Boundaries are not impenetrable walls. The Bible does not say that we are to be walled off from others, but that the fences of our boundaries need gates. Through this gate, through interaction with Jesus and others, the good can come in and the bad can get out. We may have some sin that we are struggling with that God wants us to confess to him or to others. Or perhaps we are hurting inside because of some loss or stress in our lives. We can confess that to God or others. When we do these things we can get forgiveness and healing as we read about in the book of James.

James 5:16

16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

Is there bad in you that you need to get out so it can be dealt with, such as sin or hurt? Is there good outside of you that you need to let in, such as forgiveness and healing? In addition to opening the gates of our boundaries by confessing our sin or hurt to get it out and receive forgiveness and healing, God also wants us to open the gates of our boundaries so we can give love to others and receive love from others. Paul speaks about this to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 6:11-13

11 Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. 12 You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. 13 Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide to us also.

Paul says in verse 11 that his heart is opened wide to the Corinthians. In effect, Paul is saying that he has opened the gates of his boundaries to the Corinthians. Paul is not closed and self-protective toward the Corinthians, but wants to give love to them and receive love from them. He is asking for the same openness so that they can give love to him and receive love from him. When we find safe people that we can open up to and be ourselves with then we can experience this same giving and receiving of love. Boundaries are not to inhibit this giving and receiving of love, but to enhance it.

We have seen the value of boundaries, but most of us struggle with setting boundaries. Improving our ability to set boundaries will require prayer, effort, and the support of others. Just as we need to exercise and work with an atrophied leg after it comes out of its cast, setting appropriate boundaries is an ability we can learn. Here are some steps to take in learning to set boundaries.

1. Be honest about your anger about others violating your boundaries. Ephesians 4:26 says, “**Be angry, and yet do not sin.**” People who have

difficulty setting boundaries are often angry because they feel like other people have power over them. They have not realized that they have given that power to those other people. Often the first step to reclaiming ownership of power is to admit the anger to themselves, God, and others.

2. Ask God to help you become a truth-teller, even of negative truth. A sign that you are beginning to set boundaries is that you will rock some boats. If people rarely get angry with you, you probably need to set more boundaries. Jesus said, **“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets.”**

3. Cultivate relationships with people who encourage use of your boundaries, instead of disliking your boundaries. The people closest to you should love your “no” as much as they love your “yes.” If those closest to you affirm your “yes,” but withdraw, throw tantrums, or attack when you say “no,” you have boundary problem to work on.

To wrap up, we have seen that boundaries are lines that mark a limit, bound, or border. Among other things, our boundaries mark what we will allow and what we will not allow in our lives. The most basic boundary setting word is “no.” Many passages of Scripture urge us to say “no” to others’ sinful treatment of us. In addition to saying “no,” we can physically remove ourselves from a situation in order to set a boundary. Boundaries help to keep the good on the inside and the bad on the outside. However, sometimes instead of having good on the inside and bad on the outside we have the opposite situation, in which we have bad on the inside and good on the outside. In these instances, we need to be able to open up the gate of our boundaries to let the bad out and let the good in. When we find safe people that we can open up to and who can open up to us then we can give and receive love as God designed.

Many of us struggle with setting boundaries for various reasons. Perhaps we have never learned that setting limits is OK for a Christian to do, perhaps we are afraid of others rejection of us if we set boundaries with them. Or perhaps we have the opposite problem, we have walled ourselves off, have shut all of our gates and we do not let others in for fear of being hurt or for some other reason. Whatever we may be struggling with, Jesus provides the answer. Remember we saw that sometimes Jesus resisted evil, but sometimes he did not resist evil. Jesus did not resist the evil of those who crucified him. He opened the gates of his boundaries and let them nail him to the cross. He took our sin upon himself so that the power of sin in our lives could be broken. Whatever sin is in the way of our setting healthy boundaries, Jesus has provided the solution through the cross. Lets ask him to release that power to us now.