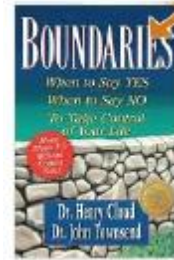


# Boundaries: where do you draw the line?

By Shirley Prescott, February 2007

What do zoo cages, basketball court lines and traffic lights have to do with homeschooling? The three examples illustrate various boundaries that keep us safe, give us order, and help us enjoy the ride. Without boundaries, life can get dangerously chaotic – and the same is true in your homeschooling experience.

Boundaries are important. They allow us to know what our responsibilities are and are not. They give us the freedom to know that when God calls us to a task, we are available. (If our life leaks outside our boundaries, we are so busy doing everything else we are not able to answer God's call.) He offers us his best, but a lack of boundaries often causes us to not wait upon His best. The Bible states in Proverbs 4:23 - "above all else, guard you heart, for it is the wellspring of life."



The definition of boundaries in the Webster dictionary is: "something that marks or fixes a limit (a border or territory)." The book *Boundaries* by Henry Cloud & Dr. John Townsend defines boundaries as a personal property line that marks those things for which we are responsible. Boundaries define who we are and who we are not.

Often as Christians we focus so much on being loving and unselfish that we forget our own limits. Typical questions include:

- ¶ Can I set limits and still be a loving person?
- ¶ What are legitimate boundaries?
- ¶ What if someone is upset or hurt by my boundaries?
- ¶ How do I answer someone who wants my time, love, energy or money?
- ¶ Aren't boundaries selfish?
- ¶ Why do I feel guilty or afraid when I set boundaries?

These are all questions we all must answer prayerfully, seeking God for guidance so we don't over step our boundaries and impede what God is doing in someone else's life. Marriage challenges, financial shortages and homeschooling issues are some of the things God can use to help us to depend upon Him. He can always be trusted, and depended on.

In the physical world, boundaries are easy to see; fences, walls, signs or manicured lawns are all physical boundaries. On the diagram illustration, you'll see your home/yard - surrounded by a fence. What is the purpose of the fence? One advantage would be that it keeps the good in and the bad out. It shows ownership, responsibility. Matt 7:6 states to "guard our treasures so others won't

steal them.” A misuse of boundaries could be that we use the fence to wall ourselves off from others, losing potentially God-honoring relationships. Another boundary issue gone awry is when we have bad on the inside and good on the outside. We need to be able to open up our boundaries (fences) with wisdom and allow the “good in and the bad out.” Our fences need gates in them, they are not walls.

What do you call a river without boundaries?  
A swamp – and swamps stink! So do some of our lives without proper boundaries. I wonder how many of us feel overwhelmed because we have no boundaries.



Take a moment and list a few responsibilities that fall within your boundaries (yard)...that God has called you to. If you’re reading this, you are probably a homeschooler. Does homeschooling belong in your yard? Write it in. It’s important to realize that just because something is within your boundaries doesn’t mean that it won’t be difficult. Also, just because something is pleasurable and easy, that doesn’t mean it belongs in your yard. Many times difficult decisions will have to be made to ensure you are hearing God. Taking greater care in your decisions ensures that the “Good” and the “Better” are bypassed for the “Very Best” God has for you.

What else belongs in your yard? I think of what’s inside my yard as my “need to’s”. What is outside of my yard are my “shoulds or likes”. Where can I find time to be replenished by God’s word? Where does quiet, intimate time with my spouse come into play? How do I find time to ensure that I have my child’s heart? Are your priority needs where they need to be? Take a few moments to list everything currently “in your yard” Prayerfully consider what should be crossed out and placed outside your fence.

Jesus had boundaries - Jesus' boundaries came from God - not personal preference. He always knew His purpose (boundaries). As you recall from (Matt 26:2, Matt 26:53), Jesus knew his purpose was to be crucified to fulfill the Scriptures.

The concept of boundaries comes from the very nature of God. God has boundaries within the Trinity. The Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit are One. At the same time they are distinct persons with their own boundaries.

He also defines Himself as separate from his creation and from us. He differentiates himself from others. He tells us who He is and who He is not. For example, He says that He is love and that He is not darkness ( 1 John 4:16, 1:6). God also has limits, what He will allow in his yard. He confronts sin and allows consequences for behavior. The gates of His boundaries open & close appropriately (love opens & sin doesn’t”).

In addition to showing us what we are responsible for, boundaries help us define what is not our property and what we are not responsible for. It may seem strange but we are not responsible for other people. For instance, in some families where boundaries are not recognized the “leave & cleave” verse is never fully realized. The new family unit doesn’t define itself.

Nowhere are we commanded to have “other control.” Galatians 6:22 says, “carry each other burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” This verse shows our responsibility to one another. Often, others have “burdens” that are too big to bear, and they need help. Denying ourselves to do for others what they can’t do for themselves is showing the sacrificial love of Christ. This is what Christ did for us. He did what we could not do for ourselves; he saved us.

Conversely, and seemingly contradictory, verse 5 also says “each one should carry his own load.” Everyone has responsibilities that only he or she carry. These things are our own particular load that we need to take daily responsibility for and work out. No one can do certain things for us. In Galatians, it is actually two different Greek words for “burden.” The burdens we need to help others with is: excess, burdens that are so heavy that they weigh us down. These burdens are like boulders. These are the times of crises and tragedy. A heavy, bowling ball-filled knapsack illustrated his type of burden. These burdens might be: death of a loved one, serious illness, job loss, etc.

The Greek word for load in the second instance means “cargo”, or the “burden of daily toil.” A lighter knapsack illustrated the burdens we are expected to carry. We are to deal with our own feelings, attitudes and behaviors as well as the responsibilities God has given to each one of us, even though it takes effort. Problems arise when people act as if their “daily loads” are boulders they shouldn’t have to carry. I would caution us all before we step in to help with the daily loads or burdens of life to be led by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

As the Potter does His work in our lives, often our personal burdens are to help define our character, test our obedience, and encourage our love and passion for Him in this lost world.

In my own life, many friends offered words of prayers, and wanted to carry the burdens that God had allowed Dan and I to experience during these past few months of relocating back to Mass. In the end it was God who provided the solace and comfort, that moved our hearts to overflowing passion for Him and for our family. Others’ love could not do this — only the breaking process. James 1:24 says “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.

Lastly, there are times in all of our lives when we must say “No”. Matthew 5:37, James 5:12 say to let your yes be yes and your no be no, anything beyond this comes from the Evil one. The word *no* lets others know you exist apart from them and that you are in control of you. We are 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” (2Cor 9:7). Many times people with poor boundaries struggle with saying *No* to the control, pressure, demands, and sometimes the real needs of others — worrying that if they say *No* to someone, they will endanger their relationship with that person. So they passively comply but inwardly resent.

We also 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 this time. Too much of a good thing is still too much. If we can’t say *No* to internal or external pressure we may have lost control of our property. Remember, a fruit of the Holy Spirit is self control, and we are told to live Spirit-filled lives.

In closing, God wants you to set healthy boundaries in your life.

So I ask, “How’s your yard?” Figure out whether you need to plant or prune — and start now.