



groupware™

**A 9-SESSION FOCUS  
ON BOUNDARIES**

**WHEN TO SAY YES  
HOW TO SAY NO  
TO TAKE CONTROL  
OF YOUR LIFE**



# BOUNDARIES

**REVISED**

**DR. HENRY CLOUD & DR. JOHN TOWNSEND**

Small Group  
  
Edition

**PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE**

## What Is a Boundary?

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*I*n this session you will:

- Define what boundaries are and why they are important
- Identify some examples of boundaries
- Find out what you are responsible for within your boundaries
- Learn that the concept of boundaries comes from the nature of God himself
- Discover how boundaries result in freedom and how freedom leads to love

## Learning Together

### *DVD Segment #1: “Sherrie Without Boundaries”*

For the next nine sessions, we are going to look at boundaries—what they are and how they can help us experience healthy relationships, love, and freedom. Sometimes it's easier to understand what something *is* by seeing what it is *not*—and that's what our opening DVD segment, titled “Sherrie Without Boundaries,” will show us.

- Sherrie is trying to do a good job with her marriage, her children, her job, and her relationships. Yet it's obvious that something isn't right. Life isn't working.
- Sherrie isn't able to draw and maintain boundaries around what is hers, boundaries that would help keep out what isn't hers.
- In the physical world, boundaries are easy to see, and they give the message: THIS IS WHERE MY PROPERTY BEGINS. The owner of the property is legally responsible for what happens on his or her own property. Nonowners are not responsible for the property.
- Just as homeowners set physical property lines around their property, we need to set mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual boundaries for our lives to help us distinguish what is our responsibility and what isn't.
- A variety of things, including past hurts, poor models, and misunderstood teachings, result in weak boundaries or in boundaries that don't exist at all.
- Boundaries define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows where each individual ends and someone else begins, leading each person to a sense of ownership and responsibility. Boundaries also protect us from the bad.

## **Talking Together**

### *Examples of Boundaries*

1. What did you find most striking about Sherrie and the way her life was going?
2. In what ways—if any—are you, like Sherrie, living life without boundaries? Be specific.
3. In what areas of life do you have boundaries but wish they were stronger? Again, be specific.

Boundaries help us differentiate ourselves from someone else; they show where each person begins and ends. Right now we're going to look at some examples of boundaries.

4. Living life with healthy boundaries begins by first simply identifying boundaries. Following is a list of some important boundaries. Turn to one or two people near you and tell them which of these items, if any, you were surprised to see on the list. Why do you think you never thought about those as being boundaries?

- *Skin* (yes, literally, the skin on your body)
- *Words* (especially the word *no*)
- *Truth* (about God and about who you are)
- *Time* (Time, as in “time away from,” can be healthy.)
- *Geographical distance* (Remove yourself from a situation.)
- *Emotional distance* (Guard your heart.)
- *Other people* (They are not you—and they can help you set and keep boundaries!)
- *Consequences* (Setting and enforcing consequences will show people that you’re serious about keeping your boundaries.)



## **Boundary Building ... On Your Own**

### *For You to Do After This Session and Before the Next One*

1. Think of a time when you stuck by one of your boundaries and people respected it. What were the circumstances? Why were you able to maintain your boundary?
2. Now think back to the group's responses to the question, "What prevents you from keeping your boundaries strong?" Which answer given in that discussion best explains why you aren't always able to maintain your boundaries? And what will you do to strengthen your boundary-keeping ability? What step in that direction will you take this week?
3. Why might you have a hard time honoring people's boundaries, especially certain people's? What will you do to be more respectful of those people and their boundaries? Be specific.

### ***The Responsibilities That Come with Boundaries***

Having identified boundaries, now we need to look more closely at what falls within our boundaries, at what we are responsible for. Following is a list of some of what each one of us is responsible for. Discuss your answers to questions 1–9 below with two or three of the people sitting near you.

- Our feelings
  - Our attitudes/beliefs/desires
  - Our behaviors
  - Our choices
  - Our values
  - Our thoughts
  - Our limits
  - Our talents
  - Our love/trust
1. Ignoring *feelings* or letting them rule over us is not being responsible for them. What does being responsible for feelings look like?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  2. When have you seen a person's *attitude or belief* cause that person to make poor choices and/or experience pain? What would have been a responsible alternative?



3. What *behaviors* do we—do you—tend to blame or at least want to blame on other people or on circumstances? Why is blaming not a responsible course of action?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What can make us feel that we don't have a *choice* in a situation when we actually do? Again, why is it not responsible to let yourself believe that you don't have a choice?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Why is it unwise to *value* the approval of people rather than the approval of God (John 12:43)? Give a real-life example that illustrates the futility of valuing people's approval.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What specific aspects of life would each of us do well to *think* through for ourselves?

7. What kind of evils is it wise for us to *limit* our exposure to? Identify subtle evils, not just obvious ones. In addition to setting limits with others—with people whose presence in our life destroys love—we need to set internal limits. What does such self-control without repression look like? Give an example or two.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. What *talent*, gift, or ability are you being a wise steward of? Share one example.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What can we do to open ourselves to receiving more of God's *love*? What can each of us do to be a more effective channel of God's love?

## Boundary Building ... On Your Own

### *For You to Do After This Session and Before the Next One*

1. What do you tend to do with your *feelings* – ignore them or let them be in charge? Why do you think you respond the way you do?
2. What *attitude* and/or *belief* is causing you to make poor choices or experience pain? What will you do to get that attitude or belief in line with God's truth?
3. What *desires* are you currently pursuing that your heavenly Father, wise parent that he is, is probably not interested in giving you? What destructive desires do you need to learn to say no to? Also, what good desires do you need to say no to because the timing isn't right?
4. What unhealthy, unhelpful, insensitive, or sinful *behaviors* do you need to take responsibility for? What will that look like? Be specific.
5. What *choice* in your life have you failed to take responsibility for? Also, whom are you blaming for what circumstances in your life?
6. Identify evidence in your life that shows which you *value* more: people's approval or God's approval. Consider a decision you currently face. Which source of approval is exerting more pull on you?
7. Whom are you expecting to read your mind, or to whom are you afraid to communicate your *thoughts*? What keeps you from doing so?
8. Whom in your life would you be wise to *limit* your exposure to? What is keeping you from doing so?

9. What *talent*, gift, or ability are you afraid to exercise? What step will you take to overcome that fear?
10. What healthy, godly relationships nurture you? To whom are you giving the kind of unconditional *love* God gives you?

## Exploring Together

### *Responsible To, Responsible For*

We've looked at examples of boundaries and at the responsibilities that come with boundaries. Now let's explore a few more foundational facts about boundaries and then discuss together the questions that follow.

As we've seen, boundaries help us distinguish our property so that we can take care of it—and we *are* responsible for taking care of it. We need to keep things that will nurture us inside our fences and keep things that will harm us outside. In short, boundaries help us keep the good in and the bad out. But these fences need to have gates so that we can let the good in and let out any bad.

This concept of boundaries comes from the very nature of God. God defines himself as a distinct being separate from his creation and from us. He has boundaries within the Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one, but at the same time they are distinct persons with their own boundaries.

God also limits what he will allow in his yard. He confronts sin and allows consequences for behavior. He guards his house and will not allow evil things to go on there. He invites people in who will love him, and he lets his love flow outward to them at the same time. Created in God's likeness, we have personal responsibilities within limits, within the boundaries that we set and maintain.

## Talking Together

### *The Right Kind of Responsibility*

1. What encouragement to set and maintain boundaries do you find in the description of God's nature found in "Exploring Together"?
2. Keeping in mind what you learned in "Exploring Together," read aloud Galatians 6:1–5 as a group.

What does Galatians 6:2 teach about our responsibility *to* one another?

What does Galatians 6:5 teach about being responsible *for* ourselves?

When has someone in your life followed Christ's example of sacrificial love and denied him- or herself in order to do for you what you could not do for yourself?

What current opportunity do you have to deny yourself in order to do for others what they cannot do for themselves? Let your group pray for you and hold you accountable to taking this step of sacrificial love.

The Greek word for *burden* means "excess burdens" or boulders that we need help carrying. The Greek word for *load* means "the burden of daily toil," something like a knapsack that we are able and expected to carry on our own. Likewise, we are expected to deal with our own feelings, attitudes, behaviors, and God-given responsibilities even though it takes effort.

## Boundary Building ... On Your Own

### *For You to Do After This Session and Before the Next One*

1. What specific aspect of God's healthy boundaries (paragraphs 3 and 4 of "Responsible To, Responsible For" on page 19) is especially significant for you? Why?
2. In what situations today are you acting as if *boulders* in your life are your daily load and refusing to seek and/or to accept offers of help that people have extended to you?
3. In what situations today are you acting as if the *burden of daily toil* is a boulder you shouldn't have to carry?
4. What have these two questions helped you to see about yourself—and what will you do as a result of that insight?

## Learning Together

### *DVD Segment #2: "Wrapping It Up"*

We're going to conclude our session by hearing a little bit more from Dr. Cloud and Dr. Townsend.

- Made in the image of God, we were created to take responsibility for certain tasks. Part of taking responsibility, or ownership, is knowing what *is* our job and what *isn't*. It takes wisdom to know what we should be doing and what we shouldn't.
- Knowing what we are to own and take responsibility for gives us freedom. If each of us knows where our yard begins and ends, we are free to do with it what we like.
- Boundaries do more than just allow us to care for ourselves. They also help us care for others in a healthy way.
- Maintaining boundaries—or, put differently, taking responsibility for our life—opens up many different options.

Realizing that we don't need to be limited by circumstances, other people, or the dictates of a critical inner voice, we can take greater control of our time, energy, and resources and experience the freedom of doing whatever we want and serving others in the ways we choose.

- The freedom that comes with knowing our own boundaries leads to love because love requires freedom. If we feel free to say no, then when we choose to give, we are giving out of love, and our service is truly Christlike.
- We need to take responsibility for our feelings, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, choices, thoughts, values, limits, talents, desires, and love.

## Praying Together

Having heard that helpful and challenging summary of today's lesson, let's close in prayer:

*God, you know us and you know where our lives resemble Sherrie's—where we have failed to establish boundaries, where we have failed to build gates in our fences, and where we are keeping out good and keeping in bad. You also know the reasons for all that—the past hurts, the poor models, the misunderstood teachings. But we want to establish healthy boundaries. Teach us to take responsibility for our feelings, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, choices, values, limits, talents, thoughts, desires, and love. Help us learn to establish appropriate boundaries so that we may experience healthy relationships, love, and freedom. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*

## Suggested Reading

For more thoughts on this session's topic, read chapters 1 and 2 in the book *Boundaries: "A Day in a Boundaryless Life"* and "What Does a Boundary Look Like?"