# Luke 9:62; Ephesians 4:26,27 January 27, 2019

*Pleasant Places, Part 2*

*Living with Healthy, Biblical Boundaries*

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 Two weeks ago we started a new sermon series entitled *Pleasant Places* from Psalm 16:6, *“****6****The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.”* The goal is for us to learn about the importance of boundaries, to be alerted to the places where we might need better boundaries, to set those boundaries according to the Word of God, and to begin to live by them so that we might have less stress, more peace, and more joy in our lives! And that’s important because as stewards of all that God has given to us, if we are allowing ourselves to constantly be distracted (and perhaps dragged down) by situations and by attitudes of others for which we are not responsible, then we are not able to offer empathy (compassion) and love to others. And if we don’t have the energy to offer empathy and love to others, then what does our Christian witness look like for others? Why would anyone be attracted to our Christian lifestyle if all we are doing is walking around like Eyore or looking like we’re carrying the burdens of the world on our shoulders – which, by the way, is not our responsibility?

I’m going to repeat a paragraph from two weeks ago to remind what personal boundaries are: “Personal boundaries are what define you as an individual. This is me, this is what I value, what I’m good at, what I believe, what I need, what I feel, what I think, what I’m interested in, what I hope and dream for – and that is not me. And the better our boundaries or self-awareness or self-definition are, the greater our capacity to offer compassion and love to others. Jesus was perfect at this because he knew exactly who he was, what he came to do, how he was called to do it, and who had given him everything he needed to do it. That stable foundation enabled him to minister to others without being distracted or depleted by personal insecurities or blind spots. Good and godly boundaries free us to be exactly who God created us to be, and do what God created us to do!”

Today we are going to focus on a very, very important boundary. In fact, while I was praying about which boundary to go with for part 2 of this series, and the answer came to me, I physically felt the weight of it in my soul. Today we are going to focus on setting our boundaries between the past and the present. We are going to learn about setting a boundary that helps us learn from the lessons of the past, but not allow ourselves to be constantly shamed, embarrassed, and condemned by the mistakes of the past. That was me then. This is me now.

Let’s pray: *Oh, Father God, how we need you now to teach us, to take your truth deep into our spirits where it will find fertile soil to grow and flourish in your people. Help us to see how we have been deceived. Help us to see how we have been manipulated. Help us to see the way through to that place of freedom in Christ, for Christ, and with Christ. Through him we pray, Amen.*

Let’s begin by looking at some scriptures together:

* Philippians 3:13-14, *“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*
* Isaiah 43:18-19, *“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”*
* 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”*
* Luke 9:62, “Jesus replied, *“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

If we are constantly looking back at the mistakes we’ve made, or even looking back at the successes we’ve enjoyed, we are not looking where God wants us to look. We are not looking at the provision of grace for today, and we are not looking forward to the promises God gives for tomorrow.

 All of us have things in our lives that we regret. Things we have done, words we have said, things we neglected to do that still ‘haunt’ us, words we swallowed instead of said because our pride wouldn’t let us, and some of us still walk around beating ourselves up for these things. Some of us have determined in our minds that the things we’ve done are worse than what anyone else has done here in the church. We’ve put our bad selves on a pedestal. “I’m the worst of the worst and I deserve to live a miserable life.” Well, the truth is, we all deserve to live miserable lives. We all deserve God’s wrath, not God’s grace. We all deserve to be sent to hell when we die because of our sinful ways, not granted freedom from sin forevermore in a place prepared just for us called Heaven. But here’s the truth for believers in Jesus Christ: If you’re in a line-up with the most spiritually healthy and mature believers you can think of – the immeasurable gift you’re going to receive is no different than the immeasurable gift they are going to receive – the gift of God’s gracious forgiveness through Jesus Christ the Lord! You don’t deserve it anymore than anyone else does, but your faith in Christ opens your hands and heart to receive it.

 We can find ourselves in situations that bring certain memories to the surface – memories of things we regret. We can find ourselves in similar situations to something that happened in the past that didn’t turn out well, and we might tell ourselves, “Here I go again.” We may be in relationships with people who seem to find satisfaction in bringing up our past mistakes over and over and over again. And we allow it. We stand there and take it, or we end up in a shouting match! We even allow ourselves to be shrunken by our mistakes, by our poor choices, years, maybe even decades later!

 Whose work is this? This is the work of Satan who wants to keep us bound up in guilt and shame even though we have been freed by the work of Christ. Satan has no patience with healthy and whole relationships; He wants to break our relationships with each other. Listen to these words from Neil Anderson, *“Even though Satan is defeated, he still rules this world through a hierarchy of demons who tempt, accuse, and deceive those who fail to put on the armor of God, stand firm in their faith and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Our sanctuary is our identity and position in Christ, and we have all the protection we need to live victorious lives; but if we fail to assume our responsibility and give ground to Satan* [by not setting firm boundaries]*, we will suffer the consequences of our sinful attitudes and actions. The good news is we can repent and reclaim all that we have in Christ.”*

Every time you allow yourself to bring up the past to yourself in order to keep yourself from something new God has laid before you, every time you allow someone else to bring up your past in order to try to re-punish you or shame you or as their means of correcting a current situation – every time you allow these things instead of setting a firm boundary – you’re giving the devil a foothold in your life. Now what does that mean?

 First let’s look at the verses these words come from (Ephesians 4:26-27), *“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,****27****and do not give the devil a foothold.”* I’ve often thought about it this way: Most of us have seen climbing walls - walls with footholds on them to help us climb higher than we could ever climb without the footholds.

 Satan is looking for footholds in our lives. We embrace anger. We won’t forgive. We won’t believe God’s Word that tells us we are new creations in Christ, we look at others with judgment instead of grace. We worry constantly. Jealousy. Resentment. We put other things ahead of God in our lives. We gossip. We lie. We live by our own rules instead of by God’s instructions. These are footholds, all of them. Footholds.

 Rick Warren puts it this way: ‘*On D-Day, Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy. It was critical that they establish a beachhead — that is, a foothold on the beach that would allow them to set up a staging area to bring in more men and equipment for the battle. From that tiny foothold, the Allied forces were able to push inland in an effort to liberate France.”*

But Satan isn’t trying to liberate you. He wants to establish a foothold in your life in order to take over more and more of your life. Once he gets deep enough into an area of sin, he turns the foothold into a stronghold (which spiritually is a walled off part of your life that exists and thrives on lies and deception against the knowledge of God), and that makes it harder for you to take back control of your life. One of the websites I visit is called ChristianArmor.net. On the site it says this about strongholds, *“As we recycle painful memories the devil speaks to us, he flourishes in an environment of negative and painful thinking. He wants us to remember every failure, every personal defect, every offense, every unkind word, every difficult relationship, and he especially wants us to remember the unfairness and inequalities of our life. He will remind us of all the things we are missing; He wants us to be unhappy, uninterested, unfulfilled, unresponsive, unthankful, and unbelieving. If through chronic negative thinking, Darkness has access to our heart, then spiritual Darkness will determine and order our destiny.*” That’s why the Scripture tells us to deal with tough stuff in our lives immediately. Don’t let the sun go down before you deal with it - otherwise, the negative emotion will fester in your heart and give Satan the opportunity to establish a foothold in your life. And before you know it, he’s crawling all over you influencing your behavior, your thinking, your stress level, your peace, and your joy.

 We need to set clear boundaries in our lives in so many different areas, but today, we are being challenged to set a clear boundary in regard to our past that will require a disciplined, biblical way of thinking, and a gracious, yet firm way of interacting with others who want to use our past against us.

 The solution begins and ends with Jesus. Say that out loud with me. “The solution begins and ends with Jesus.” *“Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come!”* In the past you might have behaved in a certain way. But now that you have put your faith in Christ and what he has done for you, you are truly beginning to understand the gift of grace that God gave to you, now that you have received his grace (knowing that you don’t deserve it but he gives it to you anyway), now that you are stubbornly grateful for his grace instead of suspicious or doubtful, now you can come up against a certain situation that feels like déjà vu, that feels like something that happened in the past that did not go well, NOW you can stand firm within your boundary: “I’m not the man I was. I’m not the woman I was. I’m not that girl. I’m not that boy. I am in Christ, and anyone who is in Christ is a new creation! Before I might have been helpless to that temptation, but I’m no longer helpless. That was me then. But this is me now – through God’s strength I can overcome.” And then we run to God’s Word, or we run to our small group prayer support here at church…. and we are strengthened in victory! And this makes us more able to offer compassion and love to others because we have blown off those footholds and are living free from the chains that were so stealthily binding us to the lies of the devil. This is when God can really start making our lives count for his kingdom. This is when we can get to the point where our past regrets become nothing more than a launching pad for God’s glory. “See what God did for me? See how he changed me and set me free? See how he made me able to live humbly, not pridefully always demanding my way? He can do the same for you…!” The solution begins and ends with Jesus. Know the truth, stand on the truth, and the truth will set you free!

If there is someone in your life who ‘just can’t let it go,’ this will be hard but you are going to have to set a clear boundary in order to live in the freedom of God’s grace. When that person begins to bring up the past, you need to stop them. Gently, but firmly. Stop them and tell them, “That was then. This is now. I am choosing to live in the here and now, trusting God to help me be a better man, a better woman, a better person. So, though I respect that you’ve been hurt by my actions in the past, I will not stay here and listen to you repeat it. It’s not ok with me. I’m not saying I haven’t messed up. I know I have. But that was then, and this is now.” And then, if the person won’t stop, if you must, walk away. Separate yourself. And keep doing this. Keep this message. Firm, yet gentle. Gentle, yet firm. “I will not allow this negative repetition in my life. Christ doesn’t hold my past against me and I’m not going to listen while you choose to do other than Christ has done.” This is hard, but it is important – not just for you, but for the person doing the accusing. *“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

Dear friends, if you are the one who keeps bringing up the past to your loved ones, whether a spouse, or a friend, or a mother or father, or a son or daughter – you’ve given the devil a foothold. Because you have allowed your hurt to turn into anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness, the devil is crawling all over you, maybe established a stronghold, and you are allowing the father of lies, the devil, to kill the relationships that mean the most to you. Set a boundary, today. “I’m not going to let the devil have his way with me anymore. I too am a new creation in Christ. I can live with less stress, more peace, and more joy starting today as I make the choice to let the past be in the past and live in the grace given to me today.” And I challenge you to make this transparently real if this describes one or more of the relationships you have by doing two things:

1. Confess & Repent. “I know that I tend to keep bringing up the past, but I want you to know that I’m not going to do it anymore (this is repentance). It’s hurting our relationship, and I want to do things that grow our relationship not hurt our relationship.” And stop there. Did you hear me? Stop there. Don’t say anything about them and their behavior or attitude. This is about you. Period.
2. Seek forgiveness. “Will you forgive me for hurting our relationship in this way?”

For the one on the other side:

1. Grant forgiveness. If you are at the other end of this conversation, FORGIVE. “Yes, of course I forgive you.”

For both of you:

1. PRAY for God to restore, rebuild, and refresh your relationship in a new way as only he can.

 I want to conclude this sermon with us praying together a prayer from Neil Anderson’s booklet, ‘Steps to Freedom in Christ.’ You received a copy of this prayer when you came in. I wanted you to have this prayer to take home so that you can pray it anytime **out loud** when you need to remember and firmly declare who and whose you are. *Thank you, Father God, that you created us to live in freedom and when we closed that door by our rebellion, you sent your Son Jesus to open it again for any and all who put their faith in you. Help us to set a firm boundary between our past mistakes and your ever-present grace. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Let us stand and pray together:

**Dear Heavenly Father,**

**I praise You and honor You as my Lord and Savior. You are in control of all things. I thank You that You are always with me and will never leave me nor forsake me. You are the only all-powerful and only wise God. You are kind and loving in all Your ways. I love You and thank You that I am united with Christ and spiritually alive in Him. I choose not to love the world, or the things in the world, and I crucify the flesh and all its passions.**

**I thank You for the life that I now have in Christ, and I ask You to fill me with Your Holy Spirit so that I can be guided by You and not carry out the desires of the flesh. I declare my total dependence on You, and I take my stand against Satan and all his lying ways. I choose to believe the truth of God’s Word despite what my feelings may say. I refuse to be discouraged; You are the God of all hope. Nothing is too difficult for You. I am confident that You will meet my needs as I seek to live according to Your Word. I thank You that I can be content and live a responsible life through Christ who strengthens me.**

**I now take my stand against Satan and command him and all his evil spirits to depart from me. I choose to put on the whole armor of God so that I may be able to stand firm against all the devil’s schemes. I submit my body as a living and holy sacrifice to You, and I choose to renew my mind by Your living Word. By doing so I will be able to prove that Your will is good, acceptable and perfect for me. In the name of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.**

*"Lord, I Need You"*

*Lord, I come, I confess. Bowing here I find my rest.
Without You I fall apart. You're the One that guides my heart.
Lord, I need You, oh, I need You. Every hour I need You.
My one defense, my righteousness. Oh God, how I need You.
Where sin runs deep Your grace is more. Where grace is found is where You are.
Where You are, Lord, I am free. Holiness is Christ in me.
Lord, I need You, oh, I need You. Every hour I need You.
My one defense, my righteousness. Oh God, how I need You.
So teach my words to rise to You - When temptation comes my way.
When I cannot stand I'll fall on You. Jesus, you're my hope and stay.
Lord, I need You, oh, I need You. Every hour I need You.
My one defense, my righteousness. Oh God, how I need You.
My one defense, my righteousness
Oh God, how I need You.*