

Pleasant Places, Part 1
Living with Healthy, Biblical Boundaries
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For the next 5 weeks we are going to look at God's Word and think together about boundaries in our life. Boundaries. As we were moving into December I was thinking and praying about January. My thinking and praying seemed to be leading us to a sermon series about building healthy relationships as we started a new year, but something about that wasn't quite right. And then one night right before I fell asleep the word 'boundaries' came into my mind. I said to the Lord, "Ok, if that word is still in my mind when I wake up, I'll go with that. Not that I feel I know a lot about it, but I trust if that's what you want for us, you'll teach me, so I can preach it the way you want me to preach it." I woke up, and it was right there. Boundaries.

Let's pray: Father God, teach us. Help us understand. Show us what we need to see. Open our hearts to want to live your way, whether we are a child, a teen, a young adult, or an adult of any age. Help us, as we begin a new year, to take the steps we need to take to live with healthy boundaries that bring less stress and more peace and joy to the lives of your children. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Does that sound good? Less stress? More peace? More joy? Well of course it does. Everyone wants those things. And when we look at the life of Jesus that's exactly what we see. We see a man who knew he was here for a one-time mission of saving the world, but who didn't seem stressed out about accomplishing it. How did he do that? I am learning that one of the important factors for him was that he had clear boundaries.

So, let's begin by defining what is meant by boundaries. We all understand physical boundaries, right? The properties where we live have property lines, boundary lines. Sometimes if you're out in the woods you come across a sign like this:



That means you've hit a boundary line. Let's just say you're at Cowan's Gap doing some hiking. You're on public property, but then you see a sign similar to this one. It means you have come up against a boundary line. Public property here. Private property there. When there are signs like this, it's perfectly clear where we are permitted to go.

But let's think about what happens if there are no signs. What if you are hiking and enjoying the scenery and all of a sudden there's an angry property owner in front of you telling you to get off his land? How were you supposed to know? There weren't any signs! And now the property owner is upset because he thought he had the peace and privacy he came out to his cabin to enjoy, and you're upset because no one likes to be confronted by a stranger in the woods.



No one, holding a rifle, is 'like' this sign. *Hippity, hoppity*. I don't think so. There are boundaries at school, at work, in sports, on the road – without them we have stress galore, we have chaos, we have a mess!

So, let's make the transition now to thinking about boundary lines. Listen to these few paragraphs from the book entitled *Boundaries* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. *"Any confusion of responsibility and ownership in our lives is a problem of boundaries. Just as homeowners set physical property lines around their land, 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. As we see in many struggles, the inability to set appropriate boundaries at appropriate times with the appropriate people can be very destructive. And this is one of the most serious problems facing Christians today. Many sincere, dedicated believers struggle with tremendous confusion about when it is biblically appropriate to set limits. When confronted with their lack of boundaries, they raise good questions:*

1. *Can I set limits and still be a loving person?*
2. *What are legitimate boundaries?*
3. *What if someone is upset or hurt by my boundaries?*
4. *How do I answer someone who wants my time, love, energy, or money?*
5. *Why do I feel guilty or afraid when I consider setting boundaries?*
6. *Aren't boundaries selfish?*

The authors continue, *"Many clinical psychological symptoms such as depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, attentional impulsive disorders, guilt problem, shame issues, panic disorders, and marital and relational struggles, find their roots in conflicts with boundaries."* But even if you don't struggle in any of those way, the truth is that we all need better boundaries – physical, emotional, relational, professional, and spiritual boundaries.

I wonder if some of you are sitting there thinking, "Oh brother. Five weeks of this? I was hoping for something I could really use as we start the year. I don't have a boundary problem. My wife, my friend, my mother, my father, my ... fill in the blank, they have boundary problems. But me, I'm good." If you're thinking that, and it is true, God bless you. I give you permission to take a nap while I preach. But if you're thinking that and it isn't true, I give the person beside you, permission to elbow you if you start to nod off. Fair enough?

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 and self-definition are, the greater our capacity to offer empathy and love to others. This is why Jesus was so perfect at this! 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!

Our responsive reading this morning came from Psalm 16. The heading for this psalm is "A Song of Trust and Security in God." Let's look at the whole psalm together, listening for teaching about personal boundaries.

"Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.
³I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord;
 I have no good apart from you."
⁴As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble,
 in whom is all my delight.
⁵Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;
 their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
 or take their names upon my lips.
⁶The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;
 you hold my lot.
⁷The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
 I have a goodly heritage.
⁸I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;
 in the night also my heart instructs me.
⁹I keep the Lord always before me;
 because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
¹⁰Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
 my body also rests secure.
¹¹For you do not give me up to Sheol,
 or let your faithful one see the Pit.
¹²You show me the path of life.
 In your presence there is fullness of joy;
 in your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

Let's look at how the writer of the psalm, King David, has firmly and clearly set boundary lines for his life.

- Verses 1 & 2, *"Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."* David is not living in fear. He has put his life into the hands of God. When life is hard, he remembers that God is the one to run to, God is the protector. Because apart from God, even with the best of friends, and with the best of marriage relationships, there is no good apart from God. That's a clear boundary friends. "You're with me God, and I'm with you. And nothing is going to change that. None of the schemes and wiles of the devil who tries to tell me I don't deserve your love or you don't really care about me, NOPE, I will not receive such lies. Boundary line. Right here. You are my Lord, and I have no good apart from you."
- Verse 3, *"As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight."* David has chosen companions for the journey who help him stay within the boundaries he has set. The paraphrase of Scripture called The Voice puts it this way, *"The beauty of faith-filled people encompasses me. They are true, and my heart is thrilled beyond measure."* The writer, David, has chosen to be with like-minded, God-aware, faith-filled people. It doesn't mean we don't allow ourselves to spend time with family members and fellow students, teammates, co-workers, neighbors, and friends who aren't faith-filled people. If we set that boundary, completely separating ourselves off from those who don't share the faith we have in Jesus Christ, we are not living as Jesus lived, are we? No! Jesus came to seek and save the lost, and we are called to continue his work. But, when you have been called over the line from unbelief to belief, God provides for us a community of fellow believers that you need, that deep down you crave to be with, people with whom you can talk about the sorrows and confusions and joys of life in a way that keeps our feet on the path of life with Christ. We can use the analogy of the ever-present-in-the-news issue, the issue of a wall on our southern border. Putting a wall up, a barrier, a clear boundary (if you will) does not mean we don't want or won't allow anyone to cross the line, but it gives us the ability to decide who crosses the line in a way that abides by the rules we have set up.
- Verses 4 & 5, *"Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot."* David has chosen against false gods, including putting up idols in his life that are always battling to take the place of God in our lives. He is aware of the lures the devil and his comrades throw our way – putting stuff on the throne of our lives instead of God himself on the throne. Every new thing that comes out, we have to have it. Every new style of clothes, every new updated phone, every new kind of hunting gear.... All can become a god in our lives. Needing to fit in, doing what everyone else is doing, talking like everyone else is talking, drinking what everyone else is drinking, driving what everyone else is driving ... can become a god in our lives. This writer has set a boundary. This is who I am. This is what I believe. God is the umpire telling me what's in and what's out. This is what I will do. This is what I will not do because the Lord is who I choose, what he puts in my cup, that's what I'm going to take in, because he has my life in his hands.
- Verses 6 & 7, *"The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me."* David is grateful for the boundaries the Lord has given. He is not fighting against them, or grumbling, or moaning around, "It's not fair!" He sees how God has led him to this place and he blesses the Lord for the way he has helped him, directed him, and changed his heart to think on the things even in the night that bring health and life to his body, his mind, and his soul. The Voice puts it this way, *"I will bless the Eternal, whose wise teaching orchestrates my days and centers my mind at night."*
- Verse 8, *"I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."* Because David has set clear boundaries, he is confident in where he is going, in the next step

he is taking, in who is with him, and therefore, is confident in his position in the Lord. Again from *The Voice*, “*He is ever present with me; at all times He goes before me. I will not live in fear or abandon my calling because He stands at my right hand.*”

- Verses 9 - 11, “*Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*” David knows that resurrection life is his! He knows that once his body has given all it can, he will get a new body in Heaven with all the saints who have gone before. He is confident in this. He has set a boundary for his mind that doesn’t allow him to doubt whether he is ‘saved’ or not. When the pastor asks him, “Do you know where you will go when you die,” this person doesn’t say, “Well, I hope I’m going to Heaven.” No!! David is confident, isn’t he? And we are called to that same confidence. Set the boundary line of faith, friends! If you have put your faith in Jesus Christ, if you have confessed with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved! You will not see the Pit called hell, you will see the wide-open space of God’s grace in a place called Heaven where finally we won’t have to think about or preach about or listen to a sermon about boundaries, because there will be no need for boundaries! In His presence there is fullness of joy and in his right hand are pleasures forevermore! The *Voice* ends it this way, “*You will not abandon me to experience death and the grave or leave me to rot alone. Instead, You direct me on the path that leads to a beautiful life. As I walk with You, the pleasures are never-ending, and I know true joy and contentment.*” The kind of life Jesus modeled for us, the kind of life Jesus died to give us, the kind of life we can have (not 100% until we get to Heaven), but the kind of life we are called to have here, the kind of life we are called to model for others (so that others would come to know, love, and serve the one who has made it all possible), IS possible if we live by healthy, biblical boundaries.

Boundaries are important. Jesus set boundaries for his personal needs, he set boundaries by walking away from inappropriate behavior, he set the boundary of speaking the truth in love, always the truth, always in love, he set the boundary of how to help people, not just give to people, but truly help people, and he set the boundary of always offering the way to grace and truth for others, never discarding anyone as ‘not worth it.’

As I close up this introductory sermon in this new series called “Pleasant Places,” let me give us 5 quick examples of how Jesus taught us to set boundaries for you to think about this week:

1. Personal Prayer Time. We read many times about Jesus going off by himself to pray. This was a boundary he set – making time to go off by himself to pray. We are called to follow his example.
2. Be honest and direct. We need to set a boundary for ourselves that we are not going to try to manipulate others for whatever reason by whatever means. We will be honest and direct. Matthew 5:37 declares, “*Simply let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*” Jesus was certainly honest and direct, wasn’t he? Honest. Direct. Those are some clear boundaries right there.
3. Set priorities. Luke 16:13, “*No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.*” For example: Sunday mornings are reserved for worshiping, learning, and building my relationship with God and God’s people. Is this a firm boundary line for you and your family? Or is it permeable? Unfortunately, it is often the poor example we set that is most quickly remembered and picked up by those around us. Set clear priorities as part of your personal & family boundaries.
4. Seek to please God, not people. Set this boundary. The apostle Paul writes in Galatians 1:10, “*Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*”

5. Obey God. Live by his instructions, not by the way you feel. Which really takes us right back to Psalm 16, a Song of Trust and Security in God. If we truly trust Him and find our security for life in Him, then we are going to set obedience to God as a clear boundary in our life. We will do this, we will not do that. We will say these words, we will not say those words. We will do this with the money God gives us, we will not do that. We will treat others in this way, we will not treat others in that way. Because living God's way reduces stress and brings peace and joy to our lives. Nothing the world can give us even comes close.

Let's pray together: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit, thank you for your presence with us in the past, in the present, and in the future. Thank you for giving us everything we need to live a life that is purposeful, fruitful, and enjoyable. We know that we have lived with all-too-permeable boundaries and we have suffered the consequences. We have not been willing to state or set or fully live within biblical, healthy boundaries. Maybe because we didn't know how. Help us, correct us, encourage us through the gift of your Holy Spirit, your Word, and the gift of one another. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.