

Pleasant Places, Part 3
Living with Healthy, Biblical Boundaries
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We are in a sermon series entitled *Pleasant Places* from Psalm 16:6, “*The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.*” The goal is for us to learn about the importance of boundaries in our lives, 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 so that we can offer compassion & love for others like Jesus did!

Last week we thought together about the boundary between the past and the present. It was a hard message, but I hope we all listened well and took it to heart. I hope we are all working towards healthier relationships, because remember Jesus’ words from Luke 9:62, “*No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.*” I surely don’t want to be disqualified for service in the kingdom of God because I can’t let the past stay in the past. I want you and me to live according to the word of God from 2 Corinthians 5:17, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!*”

Today, we are going to think about setting healthy, biblical boundaries in our lives between want and need. Between need and want. What is it we simply want vs. what is it we really need? This is important in our country where we are bombarded with message after message that we *need* more of this, we *need* more of that, we *need* to upgrade, we *need* the next best model, we *need* the latest fashion, we *need* a bigger house or a better truck, we *need* to lose 10 pounds by next Friday, we *need* a fancier car, we *need* a new piece of equipment, we *need* a boyfriend, we *need* a different job, we *need* to get into that school. Some of us have had these same perceived needs ourselves and have had these perceived needs met. We received the new pants, the new house, the new job, the new boyfriend – but then discovered that we still had a desire for more, we still had a void that we thought those things would fill. We thought they were needs but they were only wants.

To grow and mature in our relationship with God, one of the things we must do is to learn to want what we need and not need what we want. Let’s pray together: *Gracious & ever-loving God, we come with open hearts to receive the food of your holy Word. Teach us in a way you know we can hear and understand. And I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts would be acceptable in your sight – would rise up as true worship to you as your truth is hungrily received and digested and applied to the glory of your name! This we pray together in Christ, for Christ, and with Christ, Amen.*

Like most involved parents of toddlers, my son and daughter-in-law went through a period when it felt like they were constantly correcting their 2-year-old when she would say something like, “I need that cup,” for a drink vs. another cup. They would say, “No, you want that cup, but you don’t need that cup.” And then they would make her say it the right way, “I want that cup.” They did a good job. But it’s hard, isn’t it? It takes consistent effort. It’s hard for children, for teens, and for adults to get the need vs. want language and attitude right. My car has 150,000 miles on it now and it’s been making some interesting noises from time to time. So, I’ve been thinking, “When I get a new car, I need heated seats. I need remote start. I need ... “ No, I don’t. No. I. Don’t. It would be really great to have heated seats or a remote start, but I don’t need either. I don’t even need a new car, or a used car. My car is still running and I have no car payment. End of story.

My dear pastor, mentor, and friend the Rev. Dr. Bill Harter just sold his home in our neighborhood. Although Bill didn’t live in that house but 11 or 12 years, he had much he had brought with him from the house before where they had raised their children. He had so many

things that had personal meaning for him, things from all his trips to Israel, books, books, and more books, photographs, prints, you name it.... How do you make the distinction between what you want and what you need in a situation like that – going from a house to a small apartment at Penn Hall? I spent hours with him helping to go through books, and I was honored that he trusted me to help him do it. It was very difficult. Can anyone relate? Need vs. want. Want vs. need.

We are going to take a look now at the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 3. Jesus has just come on the scene to begin his earthly ministry. John the Baptist is baptizing people in the Jordan River and he sees Jesus approaching. Let's read it. *"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'"* News Flash: Any time we are trying to talk ourselves around what God himself is saying must be done, we are on the wrong side of that conversation. John said that he needed Jesus to baptize him not the other way around. But Jesus replied, *"It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."* In other words, "This is what we need to do, John." So, John gave in and did what Jesus said. So much has been written about this. Jesus didn't really need to be baptized in the same way that you and I need to be baptized, but Jesus obviously needed to submit to baptism as a way of showing his humility, his obedience, and his submission to the will of God. It was a moment of anointing by the Holy Spirit as he began his public ministry. Just listen to the text, *"And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'"*

We can learn a lot from this story. It made sense for John the Baptist to say that he needed to be baptized by Jesus. It makes sense to us right now. But at that moment, in accordance with God's plan and God's will, John's desire for baptism by Jesus was a mere 'want' in comparison to the true 'need.' It was a true need that Jesus fulfill God's plan in that moment. It was a mere want for John the Baptist to be baptized by Jesus in that moment. Want vs. need. Need vs. want. If we want to mature in our relationship with God, we have to learn to not need what we merely want, and want only that which we truly need. Little picture vs. big picture. Immediate vs. long-term. Temporary vs. eternal. Want vs. need.

This is so powerfully and simply illustrated in what happens next when Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The Scripture tells us in Matthew 4:2, *"After fasting forty days and forty nights, he (Jesus) was hungry."* He needed food. No debate on that, right? He needed food. He was weakened physically by a desperate need for food. We can get this way when we think we need something. A new job, a girlfriend, a particular word from the doctor, an acceptance letter, a phone call from a friend.... In that moment the devil comes and tries to use Jesus' weakened condition as a foothold. He tempts him to do a little miracle, turning stones into bread. He tempts him to abuse his supernatural power by jumping off the top of the temple. He tempts him to reject God as the ultimate object of worship by inviting Jesus to bow down and worship him, the devil! Jesus was hungry. He was weak. After 40 days, his body wanted food. But bottom line, he needed to be obedient to the Father and His will more than his body wanted food. Could we turn it around and have it make biblical sense? Could we say that Jesus wanted to be obedient to the Father, but he needed food more. No! He needed to stay in relationship with his Father in Heaven by remaining obedient to Him, and so food took a back seat. He lived perfectly within the boundary lines that he set between want and need.

And then in Matthew 4:18-22 we read this, *"Walking along the beach of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers: Simon (later called Peter) and Andrew. They were fishing, throwing their nets into the lake. It was their regular work. Jesus said to them, 'Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass.'" They didn't ask questions, but simply dropped their nets and followed. A short distance down the beach they came upon another pair of brothers, James and John, Zebedee's sons. These two were sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, mending their fishnets. Jesus made the same offer to them, and they were just as quick to follow, abandoning boat and father."* Did they really want to leave everything behind like that? Did they

wake up that morning and throw extra clothes and some granola bars in a duffel-bag so they'd be ready? Did they make sure their phones were fully charged before leaving home so they could check in regularly 'til they got to the next charging station? This is a real challenge for us to grasp. Want vs. need.

Jesus stood in front of them and made the invitation to follow him. And in that moment, they knew that what they needed more than anything was to do just that. What they needed more than anything they could ever want, was to be in a relationship with Jesus – to go where he went and to soak in his every action and his every word. In that moment, the boundary was perfectly clear for them. “Though this is the life I always thought I wanted, though when I woke up this morning I was sure the highest need on my list was a repaired net so I could catch more fish, now that I stop and really think about it, now that I am being confronted with an invitation by Christ, now, I am truly asking myself the question, “Is this just something I want, or is it something I need? Now, I realize I need to do this Jesus’ way. I need to put my hand to the plow and not look back!

And look what happens next in chapter 4. There is no coincidence regarding the sequence of things here. Absolutely no coincidence. Matthew 4:23-25, *“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.”* As people started following him, they were healed. I don’t think they were healed because their physical healing was their greatest need. I think they were healed because they knew deep in their souls that they needed to get to Jesus. They needed to follow Jesus. They needed to go where he went. They needed to watch his actions and listen to his words. They recognized that their greatest need was the need to get as close as close can get to Jesus this side of Heaven.

In light of this boundary today, I want to share with you a decision that the trustees and elders made this past week in regard to our building. Need vs. want. Want vs. need. For the last several years our small group attendance on Sunday mornings has been growing. Last Sunday we set a new record. We had 98 people in 9 different classes: preschool, K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12, and 4 adult classes. I can’t tell you how excited I get about that, because the personal connections we make with one another that really make a difference in how we live out our faith day-to-day, those connections happen in smaller contexts than this one right here. This is worship. This is vitally important. But without the smaller group context for accountability, fellowship, study, personal prayer, and encouragement, I believe our maturation as disciples is stunted. As I pray that God would stir up a hunger in us to study his Word and put within us a desire to live grateful and gracious lives that reflect the great commandments to love God and love our neighbors, I see God answering this prayer. I see it. I hear it happening in our classrooms. I feel it in the love being expressed among us. Thanks be to God! But we have a problem. We have a need, not a want, a need. We need more small group space. Without taking up some of our lawn area, and without spending tens of thousands of dollars, I believe the trustees have proposed a viable solution that the elders have unanimously approved that makes sense not just for immediate needs but for the needs of future disciples.

We are going to take the stage in the Assembly Room out and put a fully-walled classroom and storage room in that space. The days of churches using stages for plays and performances has passed. It was popular in the 50’s when that wing of the church was built, but those days are fading, or have faded out. We have to go with the needs, not the wants of keeping something for purely nostalgic reasons. We will take the entire stage out, revealing an Assembly Room level floor. We will build a wall between the Assembly Room and the new room, we will include storage as needed and necessary, which will provide an additional medium-sized classroom that will help on Sunday mornings, Wednesday nights, and God-willing provide a viable solution to our Turkey Supper take-out flow. I know this is hard for some to hear for those who have been

here their whole lives. But this is a clear want vs. need. This, I believe, is a wise response to a true need for those who are here now and for those who aren't here yet.

What have you been thinking about as you heard this message this morning? What has God put in your mind and heart about a want vs. a need in your life? I've shared a want vs. a need in my life, in the life of a dear friend, and in the life of our church family. But where does the rubber hit the road for this in your life or in the life of your family?

When we are set free from being imprisoned by the dark hole of our never-ending wants (perhaps believing they were needs), we are able to offer compassion and love to others in so many different ways that we couldn't before. When we have set the boundary line between mere wants and true needs in our lives according to what Jesus says, we can live life lighter! Which means: Less stress, more peace, and more joy! Grab onto Jesus. He alone can set us free! SHOW VIDEO: (A Man Fell in a Hole).

"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.*

Amen.