

Pleasant Places, Part 5
Living with Healthy, Biblical Boundaries
Laurie Ruby

Over the past month, we have been studying biblical boundaries so that we can live with less stress, more peace, and more joy. So far, we have walked through the boundaries of Psalm 16. We have studied the boundary between our past and present. We have studied the boundary between need and want. Last week, we looked at the boundary between helping and hurting. As we learned in week one, boundaries help us define who we are and who we are not. This is me, this is what I value, this is what I believe, and this is not me. And we asked these 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?*

What holds many people back as they seek to establish and uphold their boundaries is the question of, 'what will other people think of me? I want to be a go with the flow type of person and won't boundaries make me look like a "stick in the mud." Possibly, we cannot control what other people think about us, but I think this is where we need to place a boundary on who we are serving: are we serving Christ or are we serving others or our-self? We need a boundary between Christ-serving and self-serving.

Let's pray: *Dear gracious and heavenly Father, thank you for your word so we can learn and study what healthy, pleasing boundaries are. Thank you for the teaching we have gleaned so far on why we need to set healthy boundaries in our lives. Help us learn today what it is to be your people and to serve you in this me-first culture. Open our minds and hearts to your word and your spirit. Amen.*

Last month, I spent a week in Charlotte, NC for a three-day intensive class called *Theology and Principles of Dynamic Youth Ministry*. For eight hours a day, I met with other youth leaders and interested church leaders discussing today's students, their culture, and how the Church can address culture. It was a wonderful week with a plethora of discussion and information, and originally, I was planning on talking more about culture and sharing some of my gleanings from this class. However, I believe that what I gleaned from this class and the discussions we had can be transferred to today's society as a whole and can be boiled down to who are we serving? Are we serving Christ or are we serving ourselves?

I am a people pleaser (as probably many of us are). I want to do my best to give everybody what they want without rocking the boat too much. Many times, I give in to what others want because I do not want to cause conflict or strife. Can anybody out there relate? I typically have a hard time deciding where to go to dinner if I go out so I just default to what other people want. When asked, "what would you like to do," my general response is, "it doesn't matter, whatever you want to do is fine." Now sometimes this is true, and other times I just say it because I would rather have the other person choose than make them do something they do not want to do. In these instances, being a people pleaser may not be a totally bad thing. But what happens when the stakes get raised. What happens when what they want to do or are doing does not align with God's word? Then what do we do?

What happens when the people we choose to hang out with begin to partake in behaviors we do not agree with? What happens when others pressure you to do something you do not want to do? What happens when your best friend is failing history and asks to look at your test answers? What happens when that person you are helping oversteps your boundaries, but you do not want to seem "unchristian?" What happens when you go visit

your best friend at college and all they want to do is party and drink, despite knowing that you do not drink? What happens when we know our kids are spending way too much time on their phones, SnapChat, and video games, but we want to be the “cool parent?” We need to draw a boundary between who we would rather please: God or man?

Jesus upheld this boundary line perfectly. He knew who he was serving and what he came to do. Many times, throughout his ministry he did things that if he was trying to please man, he wouldn't have done. Jesus touched and healed the outcast of society. He stood up to the religious leaders of his day. He submitted himself to death because he knew he was serving God and not himself. In Mark 8:31-38, Jesus teaches his disciples about serving God versus serving themselves. *“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ he said. ‘You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”*

This relatively short teaching from Jesus packs a punch. It goes against our me first attitude. Peter, and presumably the rest of his disciples, did not want their ministry with Jesus to end. They wanted this time of learning from him and being with him to continue. They might have enjoyed the “rock star” welcoming when they traveled from city to city. They enjoyed the time spent with their teacher and friend. They witnessed amazing things with Jesus and they did not want it to end. All in all, these aren't bad things. They just weren't in alignment with God's plan of redemption. Jesus tells them, *“You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”* Peter was not thinking about God's plan, but his own plan.

We can fall into this same old trap. This trap has been around since the beginning of Creation. Since Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, humanity has been focused on the things of man. Today we keep chasing after the things of man. We chase after success and money at our jobs. We chase after trying to please people so we can avoid conflict. We can chase after the things that we want no matter who or what gets left behind. Teenagers need to get good grades so they can get into that college so that they can get their dream job so that they are financially secure enough to buy that four-bedroom house, get married, and have two children. This is the American dream, right? Having the right job so you can “afford” what you want when you want and then retire comfortably to Florida? I mean this doesn't sound all that bad. I wouldn't mind retiring to Florida. I could really be a great Disney world employee. But is this the plan God has for my life? Probably not. And to be a Christ serving disciple, God's plan is more important and better than what my plan is. One of our core beliefs is, *“We believe that Jesus is the head of the body, the Church; therefore, he must have first place in everything.”* Everything means everything. When we are willing to give Christ first place and serve him, we can have less stress, more peace, and more joy.

Let me give you an example. Many of you know that when I graduated college I worked for the state in a Youth Development Center in Loysville. Basically, it was a state run juvenile detention center where they sent teenagers who committed crimes ranging from drug-related offenses, probation violations, and even some more serious offenses such as assault. This was what I went to college to do and apparently, I wasn't half bad at it. It was a state job so the benefits were pretty good. I quickly was able to switch my schedule around allowing me to have Sunday mornings off. I had plenty of opportunities of advancement. Had I stayed I could have moved up to supervisor or counselor rather quickly, and in actuality my

supervisor flat out told me that. There was only one problem. I was absolutely miserable in that job. I was stressed out to the max. My people pleasing ability to be the “cool staff” and fit in was compromising my boundaries. I was not experiencing peace and joy while I was there. If I had followed my plan, I am certain it would have led to destruction. Instead, I went with God’s plan and here we are. And yes, there are times when I do experience stress, but it is significantly less than where it was. Consequently, there is definitely more joy and peace in my life now than there was then.

This is an example of choosing to serve Christ over my plan for my life. What does it look like for you? Is it choosing to serve Christ with our words and how we use media? Maybe not sharing that post or giving someone a piece of our mind. Is it choosing to spend more time in God’s word and prayer rather than scrolling through Facebook, playing WordScapes, or watching television? Is it choosing doing what God’s word says over being popular? Is it forgiving someone who hurt you over holding onto grudges and bitterness? Is it choosing saying no to that toxic relationship that draws you away from God? We all have tendencies and areas of our lives in which we choose to serve ourselves rather than God. I know I do. We all do. Serving Christ does not always mean following the popular opinion. I think we all can clearly see that.

But how do we set and maintain this boundary between serving Christ and serving ourselves or others? It is so much easier just to give into this world and conform. It is easier to give in than stand up. This is true, it is easier to just go with the flow of what everyone else is doing. But this is exactly what God tells us not to do through the Apostle Paul. Romans 12:2, *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing perfect will.”* Galatians 1:10, *“Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”*

Paul tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind and then we will be able to draw that boundary line of serving Christ or serving man. How do we renew our minds? We think Christianly and critically about what is going on around us. In my intensive youth class, we were given a tool called *“How to use your head to guard your heart: A 3(D) Guide to Making Wise Media Choices.”* It’s a tool to help young people to think about what media they are consuming, but quite frankly I think it can be applied to a lot more than that. The three (D)s are 1. Discover, 2. Discern, 3. Decide. On the very first page it opens with this, *“If you could reduce God’s message to you on media to its simplest terms, it might go like this: Because I love you, I tell you this: Imitate and think about me! Avoid using, imitating, and believing media that promotes themes, messages, and behaviors that I say are wrong. They will slowly steal your heart, harm you, and destroy you. But go ahead and indulge yourself in and celebrate media that promotes those themes, messages, and behaviors that I say are pure, true, lovely, and admirable. Let me ask you this...does your media lead you closer to me and my ways? Or, does your media pull you away from me and my ways? Prayerfully and deliberately look at the world of media through the “eyes” of my Word. Use your head to guard your heart because in the end, you’ve been made to glorify me through all you have, do, and are.”*

What would it look like if we thought about those questions before we made any decision in our life? Does this draw me closer or further away from God? Is this something that is pure, true, lovely and admirable? Will this action glorify God or myself? Will this bring me more peace or more stress? Will this help bring others to Christ? We need to stop, breathe, ask these questions, pray and commit. We need to commit to upholding this boundary and not go back on our word. It will not always be easy serving Christ. It has never been easy serving Christ. Many of the first Christians died while serving Christ and clinging to him despite the culture they lived in.

But let’s return to Psalm 16, which is where we began this series. *“I have set the Lord, always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad and*

my tongue rejoices; my body will also rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." God has told us in his word that when we set the boundary to serve Christ over ourselves he will give us the strength and encouragement to stand. He doesn't let us uphold this boundary on our own, but stands with us. The same power and Spirit that rose Jesus from the grave and emboldened those early believers lives in us. Where is your boundary line? Where do we draw the line in the sand and say no, *"in Christ I am a new creation!"* I will no longer live my life as the world around me sees fit, but will align my life to God's plan. Are we willing to give our hearts to God and serve him only?

Lord, help us to draw this boundary line. Help us to serve you fully and give our all to you. Give us the courage and boldness to discern and commit to your good and perfect plan for our lives. We know that you are with us always and you have not abandoned us to do this on our own. You have placed these boundaries in our lives so that we can have less stress, more peace, and more joy. Help us give up ourselves so we can have more of you in our lives. We need you, Lord. We trust you, Lord. We love you, Lord. As we leave, may you continue to speak grace, love, and truth into our lives. Amen.

*Here's My Heart Lord
David Crowder*

*Here's my heart Lord
Here's my heart Lord
Here's my heart Lord
Speak what is true*

*'Cause I am found, I am Yours
I am loved, I'm made pure
I have life, I can breathe
I am healed, I am free*

*'Cause You are strong, You are sure
You are life, You endure
You are good, always true
You are light breaking through*

*Here's my life Lord
Here's my life Lord
Here's my life Lord
Speak what is true
Speak what is true
Speak what is true*

*You are more than enough
You are here, You are love
You are hope, You are grace
You're all I have, You're everything*

*Here's my heart Lord
Here's my heart Lord
Here's my heart Lord
Speak what is true*