

# BOUNDARIES

“When to say yes, when to say no, to take control of your life.”

by Dr. Henry Cloud, Dr. John Townsend

## Introduction

### What are boundaries?

Boundaries are invisible property lines, invisible fences that define where my property begins and where my property ends. They show people where my responsibility for me begins and where my responsibility for others ends. Boundaries show others what I am responsible for and what they are not responsible for. Boundaries help us keep the good in and the bad out. They guard our treasures so that people will not steal them.

### Try this:

Draw a large circle on a pieces of paper and write the words inside the circle that describe what yo want in your life in the future - who you want to be. (*Examples: words that describe desirable feelings, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, choices, values, limits, talents, thoughts, desires.*) Label the line of the circle as “Boundaries”. Boundaries help us keep things that will nurture us inside our fences and keep things that will harm us outside. Boundaries guard our treasures (*Matthew 7:6*) so that people will not steal them.

**God himself has boundaries.** He is our example. He defines himself as a distinct, separate being, and he is responsible for himself. He defines and takes responsibility for his personality by telling us what he thinks, feels, plans, allows, will not allow, likes, and dislikes. God’s world is set up with laws and principles. He designed them for our own good. Spiritual laws are as real as physical laws such as gravity, rotation of the earth, magnetic fields, etc. Just because we have not been taught these spiritual laws of life and relationship does not meant that will not rule. We need to know God’s laws, His principles; then choose to operate according to them instead of agains them.

## TEN LAWS OF BOUNDARIES

### Law #1 The Law of Sowing and Reaping

The law of cause and effect is a basic law of life.

The Bible calls it the Law of Sowing and Reaping. When God tells us that we will reap what we sow, He is not punishing us; He’s telling us how things really are. In Galatians 6:7-8, what does Paul teach about sowing and reaping? What if anything have you sown ‘to your own flesh’ (*i.e. overeating, acting out, overspending, selfishness, ignoring God’s commandments etc.*), and what did you reap as a result?

### Law #2 The Law of Responsibility

The law of responsibility says “You are responsible for yourself, I am responsible for myself.” But this law also includes loving others. We are to **love** one another, not **be** one another. In fact, the commandment to love is the entire law for Christians (*Galatians 5:13,14*). Any time you

do not love others, you are not taking full responsibility for yourself; you have disowned your own heart. What does Jesus teach in John 15:12? What Biblical command for personal growth do you find in Philippians 2:12-13? What are you doing to take responsibility for your personal and spiritual growth?

### **Law #3 The Law of Power**

God gives you the power to do many things. Which, if any, of the following questions have you asked yourself? Understanding the law of power will help you understand these questions.

Ask yourself: "Am I powerless over my behavior?"  
"If I am, how can I become responsible?"  
"What do I have the power to do?"

Read through what Paul says in Romans 7:15-23. What phrases can you especially identify with? What specific struggles do the phrases you listed bring to mind? Here are some examples of what you DO have power over:

- You have power to agree with the truth about your problems.
- You have the power to submit your inability to God and turn your life around. (See *Matthew 5:3,6; James 4:7-10; 1 John 1:9*)
- You have the power to turn from the evil that you find within yourself.
- You have the power to humble yourself and ask God to help you with your developmental injuries and leftover childhood needs.
- You have the power to seek out those who you have injured and make amends.
- You have the power to forgive those who have hurt you!

### **Law #4 The Law of Respect**

If we love and respect people who tell us "No", they will love and respect our "No". When we think about setting boundaries and trying to live by them, we fear that others will not respect them. We focus on others and lose clarity about ourselves. When we judge others' boundaries, ours will fall under the same judgment. If we condemn others' boundaries, we can expect them to condemn ours. What does Jesus teach us in Matthew 7:12? To whom do you need to, in the spirit of Jesus, grant the freedom to be himself or herself and be different from you? See. (*2 Corinthians 3:17*)

### **Law #5 The Law of Motivation**

The Law of Motivation says this: Freedom first, Service second. Besides the fear that we will lose love and the fear that people will be angry with us, other false motives keep us from setting boundaries. Which of the following FALSE motives have been behind some of your actions?

- Fear of Loneliness
- Thinking that to love means always saying yes
- Thinking that good people will always say yes
- Trying to overcome the guilt inside and feel good about yourself
- Paying back all that you have received

- Trying to gain people’s approval, people who may represent your parents, whose approval was withheld
- Over identifying with the other person’s loss, and feeling the sadness you *think your “No” word* will cause them

What life experiences and early relationships have helped cause these false motives? Let God work on the fears, resolve them, and create some healthy boundaries to guard the freedom you were called to. **FREEDOM IS ONE OF YOUR TREASURES.**

### **Law #6 The Law of Evaluation**

We need to evaluate the effects of setting boundaries and be responsible **TO** and not **FOR** the other person. Deciding how to set boundaries is difficult because it requires decision making and confrontation, which may cause pain to someone you love. But, just because someone responds to your boundaries with hurt or anger does not mean you should avoid setting them. Proverbs 27:6 says that the wounds made by a friend are intended to help, but an enemy’s kisses are too much to bear. Ask yourself these questions.

“What current circumstance calls for you to set boundaries?”

“If you set boundaries, what pain or disappointment might you cause someone you love?”

“Whom would you like to be able to confront about their wrong actions?”

Now, in a time of prayer, ask God to purify your heart and give you the words to speak in love. Write down the ideas you receive and reflect on these final two thoughts.

1. How do you tend to respond when someone confronts you with the truth about your wrong behavior?
2. How would you like to respond the next time someone confronts you?

### **Law #7 The Law of Proactivity**

In the physical world, for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. This is also true in the spiritual world. A good example of the spiritual dynamic is where Paul says that wrath and sinful passions are a direct reaction to the severity of the law. (See. *Romans 5:20, 7:5-6; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21*)

Have you ever seen someone, after years of trying to please everyone, go ballistic when their pent-up rage explodes? This is often the reaction to feeling powerless in life or being victimized. This reaction is necessary for the establishment of “New” Boundaries but these “Reaction Phases” are not sufficient enough to do that job alone. If we keep reacting in these explosive ways we will simply “Devour” each other as it says in Galatians 5:13-15. So, we must move to a PROACTIVE phase of setting up boundaries. This is where you are able to use the freedom you gained in the reaction phase to set up a new normal. Proactive phases are marked by what is loved, enjoyed, and served not by what is hated and can no longer be accepted. Proactive people are showing you what they love, what they want, and what they stand for. Where are you on this? **Are your boundaries still more reactive than proactive?** *Are you channeling your power into angry outbursts of pain or rage, or is your energy applied to acts of responsibility and love?*

### **Law #8 The Law of Envy**

The Bible speaks strongly against the envious heart (*James 4:2*). But what does envy have to do with boundaries? Envy is probably the basest emotion we have. Envy defines “good” as ***what I do not possess*** and it causes me to ***hate the good that I have***. What is so destructive about this sin is that it guarantees that we will not get what we want and it keeps us continually dissatisfied. What things do you tend to envy most?

As bad as envy is, we are not saying that it is wrong to want things that we do not have. God said that He will give us the desires of our heart (*Psalms 3 & 4*). *The problem with envy is that it focuses outside of our boundaries and onto others.* What truth does Paul set forth in Galatians 6:4? What is the focus we are called to here?

People who do not have boundaries, feel empty and unfulfilled. They look to another’s sense of fullness and feel envious. This time and energy needs to be spent on taking responsibility for their own “Lack” and spent on doing something about it. Your envy should be a sign to you that something is lacking in your life. When you feel envy, ask God to help you understand what you resent, why you do not have what you are envying, and whether you truly need it. **Ask Him to show you how to get there or grieve what you cannot have and be content with what you do have!**

### **Law #9 The Law of Activity**

Human beings are responders and initiators. We respond to invitations and push ourselves into life. But many times we have boundary problems because we lack initiative, we are passive. Being proactive is the God-given ability to propel ourselves into life. How easy or how difficult is it for you to respond to invitations and opportunities? How easy or difficult is it for you to take initiative in life? A good place to study is the story of the “Talents” in Luke 19:12-27. What kind of people succeed in the story and what kind of people lost out?

What does Hebrews 10:38-39 say to you personally? Where is it that God is calling you to act in faith and not “SHRINK” back? Name something that you know you should show initiative in and be specific.

### **Law #10 The Law of Exposure**

A boundary line is a property line that defines where you begin and end. The most important reason why you need such a line is that you do not exist in a vacuum. You exist in a relationship with God and others. Your boundaries define you in relation to others. Boundaries are really about relationships and love. The law of exposure says that your boundaries need to be made visible to other people and communicated to them in the context of a relationship. We have boundary problems because of our fears about our relationships.

With whom do you have a hard time communicating your boundaries to?

What does Ephesians 4:25,26 and 5:13,14 have in them that relates to communicating your boundaries with others?

**Remember that boundaries already exist and they affect us, whether or not we communicate them.** Start to lovingly communicate your boundaries with others.

## REVIEW OF THIS PORTION OF THE BOOK, "BOUNDARIES" BY CLOUD AND TOWNSEND

God himself has boundaries. He is our example. He defines himself as a distinct, separate being, and he is responsible for himself. He defines and takes responsibility for his personality by telling us what he thinks, feels, plans, and allows, will not allow, likes and dislikes. He has communicated His boundaries in the most loving and vivid way possible.

What is it that God is saying to you through this lesson on boundaries? What boundaries would you set for yourself in order to have a better life? Here is a final point.

The authors have summarized the 10 laws of boundaries in this way; "When God rescued His people from the Egyptians, He taught them His laws, His principles, and His ways. These proved to be life to them. But, they had to learn his laws, practice them, and fight many battles to internalize these principles of faith. God has led us out of captivity also: whether out of a dysfunctional family, the world, or our own religious self-righteousness. He has been our redeemer. What He has secured for us now needs to be possessed. ***The land He has brought us into has certain realities and these laws are found in His Word. Our responsibility is to learn these laws, practice them, appreciate them, experience the freedom they give us, and then to love others the way God intends for us to.***" We must learn boundaries in order to experience more of the abundant life that Christ has provided for us.