

Session 13

Boundaries

Welcome and Prayer

Ask for a volunteer to open the session with prayer.

Sharing

Invite the group to share any insights, questions or revelations from the daily reflections from the prior week.

Introduction of Session Focus

In the next few days we will be looking at the issue of setting and keeping boundaries. As Christians we are called to care for one another but without proper boundaries, ministering to others can be a source of stress and burnout.

In every community, we have our own space and property. The boundaries which define what belongs to us need to be permeable enough to allow others in, and strong enough to keep out unwanted danger.

Boundaries in ministry are the limits or borders we place on relationships, which enable us to have a balance between closeness and freedom. They are a safeguard to what is acceptable and what is not. When we minister to one another, it is imperative that we respect the boundaries of others, as well as understand our own boundaries in a relationship.

The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) models good boundaries in many ways. It demonstrates when and how they should be observed. We know that the Samaritan took care of the injured man, by bandaging his wounds, bringing him to an inn to rest and heal, and paying for his time there. But what if he had no boundaries?

What if the injured man awoke and said, "You can't leave me, I'm frightened and all alone. I need you to stay with me." We know the Samaritan had business to attend to in Jericho, but suppose he postponed going there because of this injured man? Whatever business he had would be unattended, resulting in a failure for him.

Sound familiar? We may be moved with compassion to give to someone in need, but then this person manipulates us into giving more than we intended, perhaps even more than we can afford. We end up resentful and angry in our giving. Knowing what falls within our own boundaries, helps to avoid these scenarios. And while setting boundaries can be difficult work, it helps us to avoid the pitfalls that a lack of boundaries can create.

Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend have been pioneers in this field and offer many insights in their excellent book on boundaries entitled, "Boundaries: When to Say YES, When to Say NO, To Take Control of Your Life."

Watch Video

Before beginning this session please watch this short YouTube video on *Boundaries* presented by Dr. Henry Cloud:

How To Set Boundaries

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjcPkKHZRCg>

Large Group Discussion

1. Were there any insights or ideas that stood out for you in the video?
2. How intentional are you in setting boundaries on your time, energy, and availability?
3. How would you evaluate your ability to set firm boundaries with your co-workers, parishioners, family and friends?
4. How comfortable are you at setting limits for yourself and others?

Small Group break-out sessions

Gather in groups of two or three.

Discipling Conversations:

Given the insights gained from the video have each person share if they have any issues setting or keeping boundaries. A possible question might be “how comfortable am I at saying ‘no’ to people?”

Allow your discipling conversations to arise naturally out of the sharing. Try to follow the flow of discipling conversations.

Where are you now? (Current Reality)

Where do you want to be? (Vision)

Does your vision reflect your beliefs, values & priorities? (Alignment)

How do you plan to accomplish your vision? (Action Plan)

What resources will you need?

How can I hold you accountable?

Set a time for your small group to meet and reflect on the daily devotions for between the sessions.

Large group wrap-up

Have participants share any closing thoughts, questions, insights or observations that arose from the break out groups.

Reminder

1. Continue to do the daily devotions and journal their insights and questions.
2. They should set a time during the second week of devotions to meet with one or two others for a discipleship guiding session.

Next week: "Servant Leadership."

Close in prayer.

Helpful Resources

Boundaries, When to Say YES, When to Say NO, To Take Control of Your Life by Cloud & Townsend, (2017) Zondervan, Grand Rapids.

The Power of the Other: The startling effect other people have on you, from the boardroom to the bedroom and beyond-and what to do about it by Henry Cloud

Devotions: Week Eighteen & Nineteen

Weekday 1

Scripture reading — 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray continually, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²²reject every kind of evil.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.

2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?

3. How can we walk the line between assuming the best in others and not being naive?

4. How astute are you at “testing the spirit?”

5. What people or processes do you use in evaluating the intentions of others?

6. The keyword in boundary-setting is “no.” How comfortable are you in saying “no” to people? If you have difficulty saying “no” to others what might be the underlying factors?

7. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What has caused you to think deeper?

Weekday 2

Scripture reading — Mark 1:35-39

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, ³⁷and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.” ³⁸And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” ³⁹And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. In the above Scripture passage Jesus needed to prioritize where he was going to focus his attention. His heart was calling him to spend time in prayer with his heavenly Father. The disciples were trying to focus him on the present demands of the crowd. His mission as the Son of God was calling him to move on to the next town to preach the coming of the Kingdom of God. Take some time to reflect on how Jesus balanced his life, set boundaries with others, and stayed faithful to his mission.
4. We often get caught up doing what is urgent, instead of focusing on and accomplishing what is important. How do you see the “tyranny of the urgent” battling against what is important in your life?
5. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Setting Priorities

When we know who we are and what we are called to do, setting boundaries becomes easier. We are called to be many things to many people. You may be a pastor, medical professional, parent, spouse, co-worker, disciple, etc. Make a list of how you currently prioritize your various vocations. Spend some time evaluating how well you keep these priorities. For instance, someone may put family at the top of the list but in reality, let the responsibilities of work or requests of others take precedent.

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What have you thought about today in this focus area that you are longing for?

Weekday 3

Scripture reading — James 1:19-27

¹⁹Know this, my beloved brothers (and sisters): let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. ²⁶If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. ²⁷Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.

2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?

3. Saint James writes that when we do not live in accord with our identity as children of God, we are like a person who forgets what he or she looks like. We are like a physician who refuses to heal or a rabbi who refuses to teach. Describe a time when remembering that you are a baptized Christian would have helped you?

4. How do you actually deal with people who invade your physical, emotional, spiritual, comfort zone? How can this passage help you respond?

5. What strategies might you develop to help you maintain your boundaries?

6. In what ways do you concentrate on “bridling your tongue?” Why is this an important skill to learn?

7. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What small specific step and active response can you take in the direction God’s Word is leading you?

Weekday 4

Scripture reading—Ephesians 4:1-16

[Paul wrote,] I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ⁹(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. What does it mean to you to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling" that Christ has put on your life?
4. What does "speaking the truth in love" look like to you?

5. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

How does this passage focus my attention first on Jesus, second on my identity “in Christ,” and third on my participation in the Body of Christ?

How is this passage moving me beyond myself to take a specific small step in the direction of serving my family, church, or neighbor?

Weekday 5

Scripture reading —Galatians 6:1-5

Brothers [and sisters], if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵For each will have to bear his own load.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.

2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?

3. In verse 2, Paul indicates that we have an obligation to “Bear one another’s burdens.” But, in verse 5 he says that each one will have to bear his own load. How can we justify these two statements?

4. Where does your responsibility begin and end in regard to bearing someone else’s burdens?

5. What does having a “spirit of gentleness” look like to you?

6. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Reflect on this week.

Reflecting on the Scriptures this week, what theme do you see developing?

Review any action steps you have felt led to take. If you have not yet started, when will you begin?

Begin to write a one or two sentence statement for this week's focus area. Try to have it reflect what the verses this week have taught you about who Christ Jesus is, and his invitation to follow him in this area of life

Saturday (before worship...preparing)

Saturdays are a day of preparation as we contemplate the coming Sabbath. Look back over the week, consider such questions as:

1. What sins will I lay before the Lord in my confession?
2. What prayers will I lift up?
3. What questions will I be seeking the answers to?
4. What burdens do I need to lay down in order to be fully open to the movement of the Holy Spirit?
5. Who might I invite to journey with me?

Sunday (after worship...pondering)

Sundays are devoted to worship and reflection. We gather together as the Body of Christ to lift our praises to God and receive what only he can give us. Later, reflect on such questions as:

1. What point of the sermon or Sunday School lesson most caught my attention? What exactly touched my heart?
2. Which song, hymn or portion of liturgy most became a prayer or conversation with God?
3. How will making my confession and hearing the absolution affect how I live this week?
4. What strength or comfort did I receive as I participated in worship today?
5. What was the gospel message I heard today and who did I share it with?
6. Who did I speak with that I can remember in prayer this week?

Weekday 6

Scripture reading — Philippians 3:17-21

[St. Paul wrote,] ¹⁷Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. What precedes this passage (found in Philippians 3:12-16), that Paul wants us to join in imitating?
4. Many people believe that boundaries are about setting limits on others. In their book, "Boundaries," Cloud and Townsend point out that setting limits on others is a misnomer. We can't set limits on others but we can limit our exposure to people who behave inappropriately. They go on to write how God, as our model, does not so much set limits as he does standards. What standards do you hold yourself and others to?
5. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What has caused you to think deeper?

Weekday 7

Scripture reading — Galatians 5:16-26

[Paul writes,] But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. As you read through Paul’s list of the “Fruits of the Spirit,” where would you place yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 in each fruit?

LOVE—

PEACE—

PATIENCE—

KINDNESS—

GOODNESS—

FAITHFULNESS—

GENTLENESS—

SELF-CONTROL—

In the areas you scored highest and lowest, what has contributed to those scores?

4. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What have you thought about today in this focus area that you longing for?

Weekday 8

Scripture reading — 1 Timothy 5:1-2

[Paul writes,] “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, ²older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.

2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?

3. St. Paul was clear that we need to set boundaries in our dealings with people of different ages and genders. What boundaries do you set when interacting with members of the opposite sex?

4. What do you do when someone intrudes on your personal comfort zone?

5. Develop a simple strategy to help you keep a personal boundary with someone you are thinking of right now.

6. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What small specific step and active response can you take in the direction God's Word is leading you?

Weekday 9

Scripture reading — 1 John 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Focus Questions

Recording your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. How can we walk the line between assuming the best in others and not being naive?
4. What people or processes do you use in evaluating the intentions of others?
5. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

How does this passage focus your attention first on Jesus, second on your identity “in Christ,” and third on your participation in the Body of Christ?

How is this passage moving you beyond yourself to take a specific small step in the direction of serving your family, church, or neighbor?

Weekday 10

Scripture reading — Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. In this passage, what are the three things God values for us that are at risk if we do not deal appropriately with a boundary violation? (hint: vs. 15, 19, 20)

4. Boundaries help us take responsibility for our own lives. They protect us from harm and are essential for every kind of relationship with people and activities. What keeps you from addressing boundary issues?

5. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Reflect on this week.

Reflecting on the Scriptures this week, what theme do you see developing?

Review any action steps you have felt led to take. If you haven't made any, creat at least one today.

Review and update the statement you wrote last week. What are several steps you could take to move in the direction God is leading you? To get started, which one do you choose?

Saturday (before worship...preparing)

Saturdays are a day of preparation as we contemplate the coming Sabbath. Look back over the week, consider such questions as:

1. What sins will I lay before the Lord in my confession?
2. What prayers will I lift up?
3. What questions will I be seeking the answers to?
4. What burdens do I need to lay down in order to be fully open to the movement of the Holy Spirit?
5. Who might I invite to journey with me?

Sunday (after worship...pondering)

Sundays are devoted to worship and reflection. We gather together as the Body of Christ to lift our praises to God and receive what only he can give us. Later, reflect on such questions as:

1. What point of the sermon or Sunday School lesson most caught my attention? What exactly touched my heart?

2. Which song, hymn or portion of liturgy most became a prayer or conversation with God?

3. How will making my confession and hearing the absolution affect how I live this week?

4. What strength or comfort did I receive as I participated in worship today?

5. What was the gospel message I heard today and who did I share it with?

6. Who did I speak with that I can remember in prayer this week?