

“Boundaries”
When To Say Yes, How to Say No
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Book Note~ Dave Kraft

Taking responsibility for others isn't working. A master of taking care of the feelings and problems of others,

Sherrie suffers from severe difficulties in taking ownership of her life.

Made in the image of God, we were created to take responsibility for certain tasks. Part of taking responsibility, or ownership, is knowing what is our job, and what isn't.

Any confusion of responsibility and ownership in our lives is a problem of boundaries.

Many sincere, dedicated believers struggle with tremendous confusion about when it is biblically appropriate to set limits.

He doesn't have a problem because you have taken it from him. Those things should be his problem, but as it now stands, they are yours. I think that the solution to this problem would be to clarify some boundaries so that his actions cause him problems and not you.

You need some fences to keep his problems out of your yard and in his, where they belong.

Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership.

Lest we stay in pain or become irresponsible, it is very important to determine what “me” is, where my boundary of responsibility is and where someone else's begins.

In short, boundaries help us keep the good in and the bad out.

Boundaries are anything that helps to differentiate you from someone else, or shows where you begin and end.

The Bible also warns us against giving to others “reluctantly or under compulsion”

(2 Corinthians 9:7).

People with poor boundaries struggle with saying no to the control, pressure, demands, and sometimes the real needs of others. They feel that if they say no to someone, they will endanger their relationship with that person, so they passively comply but inwardly resent.

Sometimes a person is pressuring you to do something; other times the pressure comes from your own sense of what you “should” do. If you cannot say no to this external or internal pressure, you have lost control of your property and are not enjoying the fruit of “self-control.”

Our point for now is that boundaries are not built in a vacuum; creating boundaries always involves a support network.

We may want more from someone else, and we pressure them until they give in. They give not out of their heart and free will, but out of compliance, and they resent us for what they give. Neither one of us comes out ahead.

We need to own our attitudes and convictions because they fall within our property line. We are the ones who feel their effect, and the only ones who can change them.

People with boundary problems usually have distorted attitudes about responsibility. They feel that to hold people responsible for their feelings, choices, and behaviors is mean. However, Proverbs repeatedly says that setting limits and accepting responsibility will save lives (Prov. 13:18, 24).

To rescue people from the natural consequences of their behavior is to render them powerless.

Parents often yell and nag, instead of allowing their children to reap the natural consequences of their behavior.

A common boundary problem is disowning our choices and trying to lay the responsibility for them on someone else.

Certainly we should listen to the thoughts of others and weigh them; but we should never “give our minds” over to anyone.

Compliants: Saying “Yes” to the Bad. Compliant people have fuzzy and indistinct boundaries; they “melt” into the demands and needs of other people. Compliants take on too many responsibilities and set too few boundaries, not by choice, but because they are afraid.

Avoidants: Saying “No” to the Good This boundary problem is called avoidance: saying no to the good. It’s the inability to ask for help, to recognize one’s own needs, to let others in. Avoidants withdraw when they are in need; they do not ask for the support of others.

Controllers: Not Respecting Others’ Boundaries. Controllers can’t respect others’ limits. They resist taking responsibility for their own lives, so they need to control others. Controllers are perceived as bullies, manipulative and aggressive.

Controllers come in two types:

1. Aggressive controllers.
2. Manipulative controllers.

Non-responsives: Not Hearing the Needs of Others

Functional boundaries refers to a person's ability to complete a task, project, or job. It has to do with performance, discipline, initiative, and planning. Relational boundaries refers to the ability to speak truth to others with whom we are in relationship.

No matter how much you talk to yourself, read, study, or practice, you can't develop or set boundaries apart from supportive relationships with God and others.

By not setting limits on her mom, Wendy was a prisoner to her mom's wishes.

In the practicing phase children learn that aggressiveness and taking initiative are good. Parents who firmly and consistently set realistic boundaries with children in this period, but without spoiling their enthusiasm, help them through the transition.

Learning to deal with a child's no is crucial to that child's development. Children need to be able to not only give a no, but also take a no. In other words, help the child learn to take limits before it's too late. The earlier the child learns good boundaries, the less turmoil he or she experiences later in life. Good relationships are built on the freedom to refuse and confront:

What we're talking about here isn't allowing the child free rein. Parents need to stay attached and connected to their children even when they disagree with them. That doesn't mean they shouldn't get angry. It means they shouldn't withdraw. A parent's emotional withdrawal can be subtle: A hurt tone of voice. Long silences for no reason. Or it can be overt: Crying spells. Illness. Yelling. Children of parents like these grow up to be adults who are terrified that setting boundaries will cause severe isolation and abandonment.

Children need to be under the authority and control of their parents, but when parents punish their child for his growing independence, he will usually retreat into hurt and resentment. Discipline is the art of teaching children self-control by using consequences. Irresponsible actions should cause discomfort that motivates us to become more responsible.

Over-controlled children are subject to dependency, enmeshment conflicts, and difficulty setting and keeping firm boundaries. They also have problems taking risks and being creative.

Below are ten laws of boundaries that you can learn to begin to experience life differently.

Law #1: The Law of Sowing and Reaping

Sometimes, however, people don't reap what they sow, because someone else steps in and reaps the consequences for them.

Just as we can interfere with the law of gravity by catching a glass tumbling off the table, people can interfere with the Law of Cause and Effect by stepping in and rescuing irresponsible people.

Rescuing a person from the natural consequences of his behavior enables him to continue in irresponsible behavior.

Today we call a person who continually rescues another person a codependent. In effect, codependent, boundary-less people "co-sign the note" of life for the irresponsible person.

Boundaries force the person who is doing the sowing to also do the reaping.

Confronting an irresponsible person is not painful to him; only consequences are.

Law #2: The Law of Responsibility

You are responsible for yourself. I am responsible for myself.

It is not good to rescue someone from the consequences of their sin, for you will only have to do it again.

A strong strand throughout the Bible stresses that you are to give to needs and put limits on sin. Boundaries help you do just that.

Law #3: The Law of Power

More people suffer from trying to change others than from any other sickness. And it is impossible.

You need the wisdom to know what is you and what is not you. Pray for the wisdom to know the difference between what you have the power to change and what you do not.

Law #4: The Law of Respect

Our real concern with others should not be “Are they doing what I would do or what I want them to do?” but “Are they really making a free choice?” When we accept others’ freedom, we don’t get angry, feel guilty, or withdraw our love when they set boundaries with us.

Law #5: The Law of Motivation

Self-centered people often get angry when someone tells them no.

Law #6: The Law of Evaluation

Things can hurt and not harm us. In fact they can even be good for us. And things that feel good can be very harmful to us.

You need to evaluate the effects of setting boundaries and be responsible to the other person, but that does not mean you should avoid setting boundaries because someone responds with hurt or anger.

Law #7: The Law of Proactivity

Law #8: The Law of Envy

Law #9: The Law of Activity

Consider the contrast in the parable of the talents. The ones who succeeded were active and assertive. They initiated and pushed. The one who lost out was passive and inactive.

God's grace covers failure, but it cannot make up for passivity. We have to do our part.

The sin God rebukes is not trying and failing, but failing to try.

Law #10: The Law of Exposure

Myth #1: If I Set Boundaries, I'm Being Selfish

Our spiritual and emotional growth is God's "interest" on his investment in us.

When we say no to people and activities that are hurtful to us, we are protecting God's investment.

Myth #2: Boundaries Are a Sign of Disobedience

When our motive is fear, we love not.

Myth #3: If I Begin Setting Boundaries, I Will Be Hurt by Others

We can't manipulate people into swallowing our boundaries by sugarcoating them. Boundaries are a "litmus test" for the quality of our relationships.

Myth #4: If I Set Boundaries, I Will Hurt Others

Myth #5: Boundaries Mean That I Am Angry

When you suddenly give those who have been imprisoned all their lives a great deal of power, the result is often an angry tyrant. Years of constant boundary violations generate great anger.

Myth #6: When Others Set Boundaries, It Injures Me

When a conflict with one significant person can bring us to despair, it is possible that we are putting that person on a throne that should only be occupied by God.

When we have a person we can't take no from, we have, in effect, handed over the control of our lives to them.

An inability to accept others' boundaries can indicate a problem in taking responsibility.

They begin to believe that their well-being is someone else's problem. They feel let down and unloved when they aren't bailed out. They fail to accept responsibility for their own lives.

Myth #7: Boundaries Cause Feelings of Guilt. One of the major obstacles to setting boundaries with others in our lives is our feelings of obligation.

Myth #8: Boundaries Are Permanent, and I'm Afraid of Burning My Bridges.

Many marriages fail because one partner fails to set clear boundaries with the family of origin, and the spouse and children get leftovers.

There is also the “I’m in trouble” side. Many adult children perpetually get into financial messes because of irresponsibility, drug or alcohol use, out-of-control spending, or the modern “I haven’t found my niche” syndrome. Their parents continue to finance this road of failure and irresponsibility, thinking that “this time they’ll do better.” In reality, they are crippling their children for life, preventing them from achieving independence.

An adult who does not stand on his own financially is still a child. To be an adult, you must live within your means and pay for your own failures.

When you are reacting, they are in control. When you respond, you are.

To understand the various issues, let’s look at a few conflicts and how they can be resolved with boundaries.

Conflict #1: Compliant/Compliant

Compliant people politely deny their own boundaries to keep the peace.

Conflict #2: Compliant/Aggressive Controller

The compliant probably grew up in a family who taught him to avoid conflict, rather than embrace it. The aggressive controller never received training in delaying gratification and in taking responsibility for herself.

Conflict #3: Compliant/Manipulative Controller

She lived in a very forgiving universe, where nice people would always help her out. She never had to face her own irresponsibility and lack of discipline and planning.

Conflict #4: Compliant/Non-responsive

Can family be friends? Absolutely. But if you have never questioned, set boundaries, or experienced conflict with your family members, you may not have an adult-to-adult connection with your family. If you have no other “best friends” than your family, you need to take a close look at those relationships. You may be afraid of separating and individuating, of becoming an autonomous adult.

More marriages fail because of poor boundaries than for any other reason.

The problem arises when one trespasses on the other’s personhood, when one crosses a line and tries to control the feelings, attitudes, behaviors, choices, and values of the other.

We do not communicate our feelings by saying, “I feel that you ...” We communicate our feelings by saying, “I feel sad, or hurt, or lonely, or scared, or ...” Such vulnerability is the beginning of intimacy and caring.

If you are angry, even if someone else has sinned against you, it is your responsibility to do something about it.

That is a rule of life. We do not get everything we want, and we all must grieve over our disappointments instead of punish others for them.

The truth is that neither one of you is selfish. You just have conflicting wants. This is what marriage is about—getting conflicting wants worked out.

Problems arise when we make someone else responsible for our needs and wants, and when we blame them for our disappointments.

Problems arise when we blame someone else for our own lack of limits.

It is important that she learns that you are not going to take responsibility for her wants. You're going to give as you choose, and she is responsible for the rest.

Other people have wants and needs of their own, and we must negotiate a fair and loving relationship and respect each other's limits.

Spouses who are wise and loving will accept boundaries and act responsibly toward them. Spouses who are controlling and self-centered will react angrily.

Remember the types of boundaries we listed earlier: skin, words, truth, physical space, time, emotional distance, other people, consequences.

You also need to own the truth about your feelings and hurts and communicate those feelings directly to your spouse with love.

Spelling out consequences in advance and enforcing them gives your spouse a choice about whether or not he or she wants the consequences to happen. Because people have control over their own behavior, they have control over the consequences of that behavior.

Developing boundaries in young children is that proverbial ounce of prevention. If we teach responsibility, limit setting, and delay of gratification early on, the smoother our children's later years of life will be.

We must allow our children to experience the painful consequences of their own irresponsibility and mistakes.

Wise parents allow their children to undergo "safe suffering." "Safe suffering" means allowing a child to experience age-appropriate consequences.

Yet, sometime in our development we learn the value of "later," of delaying one good for a greater good. We call this skill delay of gratification. It's the ability to say no to our impulses, wishes, and desires for some gain down the road.

They need to know that the world doesn't revolve around them.

the ability to learn to accept limits teaches us to take responsibility for ourselves.

You owe no one an explanation about why you will not do something that is not your responsibility.

“Poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part.

the problem often isn't the high cost of living—it's the cost of high living.

our boundary conflicts may not be all our fault. They are, however, our responsibility.

Rescuing someone is not loving them. God's love lets people experience consequences.

The basic problem in human relationship is that of freedom. We call people bad because they do not do what we want them to do. We judge them for being themselves, for fulfilling their wishes. We withdraw love from them when they do what they feel is best for them, but it is not what we want them to do.

We have seen over and over in this book how the Bible tells us to have good boundaries, to enforce consequences, to set limits, to grow up and separate from families of origin, and to say no. When we do these things, we are doing right.

Many people do not have good boundaries because they are afraid of disobeying the internal parent inside their heads.

No one has the power to “make you feel guilty.” A part of you agrees with the message because it taps into strong parental messages in your emotional brain.

One of the first signs that you're beginning to develop boundaries is a sense of resentment, frustration, or anger at the subtle and not-so-subtle violations in your life.

Our inability to get angry is generally a sign that we are afraid of the separateness that comes with telling the truth.

Taking responsibility for yourself is healthy, and you will begin to understand that taking responsibility for other adults is destructive.

many people carry around an extremely self-critical—and inaccurate—conscience. They feel that they are transgressing when they aren