BOUNDARIES:
When to Say Yes, When to Say No
to Take Control of Your Life
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I. 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.

Activity: Have mentee draw a large circle on a piece of paper and write words inside the circle that describe what she wants in her life in the future—who she wants to be. (Examples: words that describe desirable feelings, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, choices, values, limits, talents, thoughts, desires) Label the line ‘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 relationships does not mean they will not rule. We need to know God’s laws, His principles; then choose to operate according to them instead of against them.

II. 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’ (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?
- Am I powerless over my behavior?
- If I am, how can I become responsible?
- What do I have the power to do?
Understanding the Law of Power will help you understand these questions.

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?

Examples of what you do have power over:
- You have the power to agree with the truth about your problems.
- You have the power to submit your inability to God and turn your life around. (Matthew 5: 3, 6 James 4:7-10 I 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 have you 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? (II 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 to say 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 would cause them

What life experiences and early relationships 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 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.

What current circumstances call for you to set boundaries?

So you hesitate to do something out of fear of hurting someone?

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?

In a time of prayer, ask God to purify your heart and give you the words to say in love. Jot down the ideas here.

How do you tend to respond when someone confronts you with the truth about your wrong behavior?

How would you like to respond next time?

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. (Romans, 5:20, 7:5-6, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21)

When have you seen someone, after years of trying to please everyone, go ballistic when their pent-up rage explodes?

Maybe that is your story. Share your perspective on this behavior.

Reaction phases are necessary but not sufficient for the establishment of boundaries. What does Galatians 5: 13-15 caution about limiting these reaction phases? Once you have reacted, it is time to rejoin the human race and establish connections as equals, loving your neighbor as yourself.

Proactive people show you what they love, what they want, what they purpose, and what they stand for as opposed to reactive people who are known by what they hate, what they don’t like, what they stand against, and what they will not do.

Where are you on this? Are your boundaries still more reactive than proactive?

Where are you channeling your power right now? In angry outbursts of pain and rage, or in 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 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 we do not have. God has said that He will give us the desires of our heart (Psalm 3 & 4). The problem with envy is that it focuses outside our boundaries 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 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.

Talk about how easy or how difficult it is for you to respond to invitations?

Comment on how easy or difficult it is for you to take initiative in life?

Review the story of the talents in Luke 19: 12-27. What kind of people succeed in the story and what kind of person lost out?

What does Hebrews 10: 38-39 say to you personally?

Where is God calling you, through this discussion, to be more active? Where will you begin to knock, seek, and ask? Be specific.

**Law #10 The Law of Exposure**
A boundary 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 relation to 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 others and communicated to them in relationship. We have boundary problems because of our fears about our relationships.

What do these two passages say about the importance of communicating boundaries?
Ephesians 4: 25-26
Ephesians 5: 13-14

With whom do you struggle to communicate your boundaries? Why?

According to David’s words in Psalm 51:6, what does God want for us?
III. Review
Which laws had the most to say to you?

What is God saying to you through this lesson on the laws of boundaries?

**Activity:** Have mentee draw a large circle. “This is your boundary. You are responsible for what is inside the boundary (your life), not what is outside of it. Now, write inside the circle, words that describe what is in your life now. (Examples: words that describe your feelings, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, choices, what you value, limits, talents, thoughts, desires, goals).”

Sometimes we have ‘bad’ on the inside and ‘good’ on the outside. What do we do about that?
We need to put a **gate** in our fence to let the bad out and the good in.

Draw a gate in the boundary around you.
For example, if I have some pain, sin, unhealthy attitude, or bad behavior in my life, I can open up the gate and communicate to God about the bad stuff so I can be healed. I open my gate for God to remove what I don’t want.
I can open up my gate to others also.—to those who might be willing to help me get the bad out.
Can you think of anyone else that might bring good things into your life? Who would help teach you what treasures are available to you and show you how to nurture them and protect them? How to tell others what your boundaries are such as telling someone ‘no’…
“**You are not allowed to treat me like this.**” or “**You cannot expect that of me.**”
Or telling someone the truth- “**What you want is not who I am. I’m not going to pretend to be someone I’m not, nor do something that is not right for me.**”
Rev. 3:20; John 1:12, John 1: 2; 2 Cor. 6:11-13.

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.

The authors summed up the 10 Laws of Boundaries this way: “When God rescued his people from the Egyptians, he taught them his laws, his principles, his ways. These proved to be life to them. But, they had to **learn** them, **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, our own religious self-righteousness. He has been our Redeemer. What he has secured for us 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 them, practice them, appreciate them, experience the freedom they give us, and then love others the way God intends for us to.”

We need **boundaries to have ownership of our lives, to protect our freedom, to guard our heart and soul, and to be able to increase our love.**

What boundaries would you set for yourself in order to have a better life?