

1.3

BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are critical to the success of being a supportive friend. Without healthy boundaries, your compassion will be unsustainable and ineffective.

BOUNDARIES

In this lesson you will:

- Consider the nature of boundaries and why boundaries are essential
- Identify the differences between healthy and unhealthy boundaries
- Learn how to set a boundary
- Explore the benefits of maintaining healthy boundaries in friendships

BOUNDARIES

Boundaries and Compassion

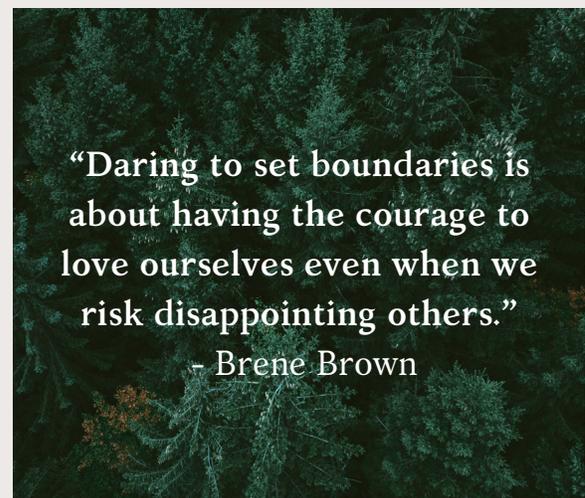
What do you think of when you hear the word “boundaries?” Does the word “boundaries” hold negative connotations for you? Perhaps a section on boundaries seems out of place in training on mentoring and supportive friendships. The purpose of this section is to help you see boundaries in a positive light and recognize their importance to your success as a supportive friend. You will be encouraged to show up for others as your authentic self in ways that are lifegiving for you as a supportive friend. This lesson has the potential to be life-transformational!

Brene Brown is a renowned research professor who speaks honestly about boundaries. Her research on the link between compassion and boundaries can be profoundly impactful. She theorized that compassion would be connected to a person’s spirituality and faith. Instead, her research showed that individuals who are most compassionate have one thing in common: good boundaries. Those who were deemed most compassionate by others were also individuals with good boundaries.

Boundaries and compassion may seem to have nothing in common, but on further study, it becomes apparent - they have everything in common.

The Nature of Boundaries

Brown describes a boundary as knowing what is okay for us and what is not okay for us. You don’t want to show up wearing a mask and being whoever the other person wants you to be. You ought to be real and genuine, giving the very gift of yourself.



Setting boundaries should not be viewed as selfish; boundaries are not selfishness. They are a gift for both the giver and the receiver. They are healthy and necessary, and they are a blessing.

Why Boundaries are Essential

Brown challenges us to think of the acronym BIG - Boundaries, Integrity, and Generosity.

B I G

BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

“What **boundaries** need to be in place for me to stay in my **integrity** and make the most **generous** assumptions about you?”

She contends that we cannot have a generous spirit without boundaries. Desiring to be liked and not wanting to disappoint others can make setting boundaries difficult. You may be uncomfortable setting boundaries because you care about what others will think. You desire to be liked and don't want to disappoint anyone. But according to Brown, although boundaries may not be easy, they are the key to loving yourself and treating others with love and kindness.

Generosity, from Brown's perspective, refers to how you view others. She asked her husband: “What if the other person was doing the best that he or she could?” Her husband's response reoriented her view of generosity: “I will never know if people are doing the best that they can or not, but when I assume that they are, it makes my life better.”

Generosity makes it possible for us to assume the best about people. The life you will change first is your own as you start to see the other person not as if he or she were intentionally trying to NOT succeed, but rather as someone doing the best he or she can.

Dr. Henry Cloud has also written extensively on the issue of boundaries. He recognizes that the difficulty setting boundaries for many people stems from holding inappropriate beliefs. He writes, “Some people think they're going to be

trusted because they're nice, loving, and compassionate. Those things certainly help, but if we say 'yes' to everything, and we don't have our boundaries in place, our 'yes' begins to be untrustworthy. The most trusted people have clear boundaries because their yes means yes, and their no means no. Others always know where they stand.”

As a supportive friend, your role is not to be all things to all people. While you strive to do your best to assist those whom you come alongside, remember it is not your responsibility to live their lives. We harm another person when we over-function in his or her life. It is unkind for us to do more for the person than is truly life-giving. This communicates to them that they are incapable of doing for him or herself. Healthy boundaries will make it possible to offer support that strengthens the other person.

Being a supportive friend does not mean that the other person will be happy with all of our responses. And many times, the most helpful thing that you can offer is a stimulating question - the type of question that encourages a person to think deeply about his or her circumstances. Helpful questions signify to the other person that he or she is the author of his or her life. They possess the ability to choose the next steps. Also important is recognizing that the other person may not always have an immediate answer. It could be that he or she has not had the space or permission to reflect on his or her life. We must be willing to sit with him or her and allow

BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

the other person to wrestle with the reality that he or she faces. A supportive friend sees the other person as possessing the ability to make choices.

Having boundaries is not saying “no” to every request. This is a misunderstanding of boundaries. Rather, boundaries enable us to have the freedom to choose what is and isn’t permissible to us.

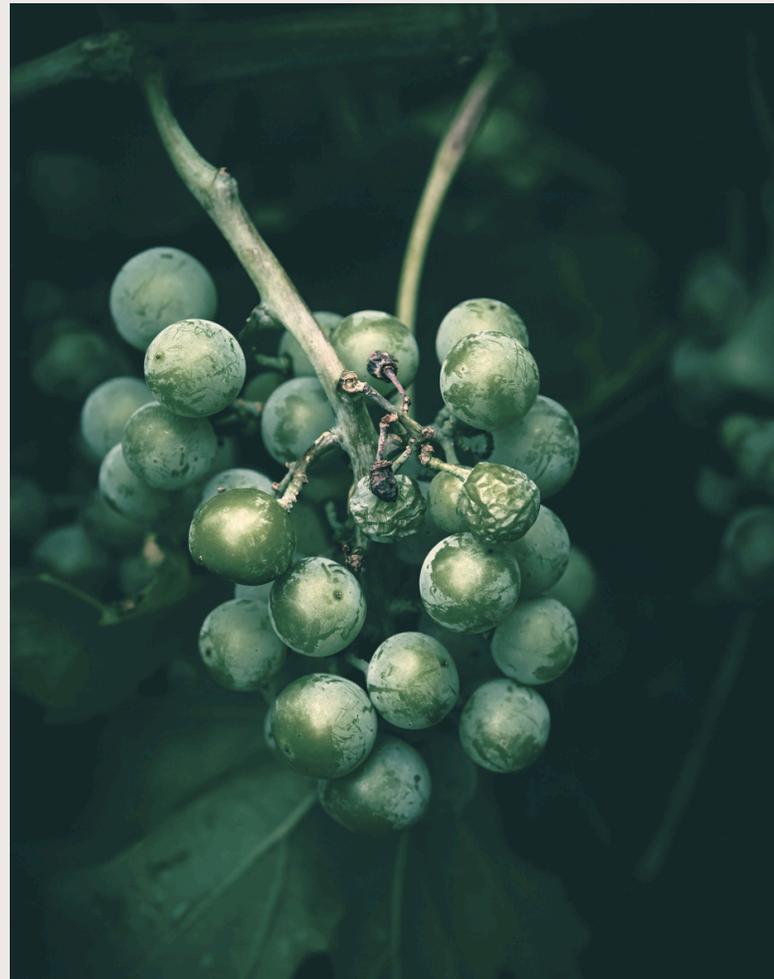
Example:

The Difference Between Healthy and Unhealthy Boundaries

Let’s consider the issue of healthy and unhealthy boundaries. Healthy boundaries are rooted in freedom, and they allow us to make decisions that align with our core values. Don’t make decisions based solely on whether you will be liked. Make decisions based on what promotes a healthy relationship. If you are motivated by a sense of obligation, this can foster feelings of resentment. You may feel used which ultimately harms your relationship.

Kristin Minto Snowden, a marriage and family therapist, provides a helpful

overview of healthy and unhealthy boundaries in the chart on the next page.



You can assess your boundaries by examining your conversations. When having a conversation with someone, ask yourself, “Do I really believe what I am saying, or am I simply saying what I think the other person wants to hear?”

If you struggle to maintain healthy and appropriate boundaries, it is important to talk to someone about these issues. If you want to be a supportive friend, start by setting up a relationship that is based on healthy boundaries and clear expectations of the relationship from the onset.

BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

Setting Boundaries

The following guidelines are suggested by counselor, Emma Cebador, for setting boundaries:

1. Identify what you want and examine your motivation for setting the boundary. Trust your intuition in this process.
2. Start small by choosing just one or two boundaries to set, especially if this is new territory for you.
3. When you communicate your boundary, stay calm and use assertive language that is direct, honest, and respectful. Use “I” statements instead of “you” statements. State your feelings and needs clearly. Be factual and consistent in what you say, and avoid judgment.
4. Do not apologize or justify yourself. Be ready to extend “no” as an answer and recognize this may disappoint others.
5. Have a support system that will encourage you to maintain your boundaries.

If we truly desire to be kind to others, we must be clear about our expectations. To be unclear is to be unkind.

Example:

Boundaries for Communication

What are your expectations around communication? Establishing clear expectations around communication is very

important. It may feel wrong to limit communication, but your well-being is important. For example, you and a supportive friend could come up with a covenant where you agree to check in with one another x number of times throughout the week. This way, you both know what is expected.

Setting a boundary doesn't prevent it from being broken, however. Boundaries will inevitably be tested and broken. How do you handle a situation in which one of your boundaries has been broken? This can be particularly difficult in a new relationship, but allowing a broken boundary to go unaddressed will create more difficulty in the long term. It may impede a healthy relationship from ever occurring. It is essential that you discuss a boundary breach when it happens so that it can be avoided in the future.

Example:

Someone calls you after midnight to tell you about the TV show they just watched. How would you respond?

If this seems harsh and lacking in compassion, remember that compassion is love in action. It is not compassionate to support a person to be less than their best self in a relationship. Remember, the goal is for each person to show up as his

BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

or her best self.

Boundaries lead to healthy and fruitful relationships. There is integrity in a relationship where the needs of both parties are honored. Integrity means...

- You are willing to address tough topics.
- You don't back away from conversations that are necessary for a person's well-being and growth.
- You serve another person well by speaking honestly to him or her about a situation.
- You care enough about the relationship that you won't let it deteriorate to the point that the relationship is no longer viable.
- You address an issue so that you don't grow resentful or burn out.
- You work for the betterment of everyone, including yourself.

Making Progress with Boundaries

You will not get boundaries right 100 percent of the time; there will be times when you struggle to maintain a healthy boundary. Taking time to reflect on your experience with boundaries may be helpful.

Dr. Cloud offers the following questions to ask ourselves

1. Was there a time you said yes when you wanted to say no? What happened?
2. What made you feel like you couldn't say no?
3. Was the other person someone you would consider a safe person?
4. What would you like to have said?
5. What feelings come up as you imagine yourself saying what you really meant? Are you feeling relieved, or do you notice discomfort?
6. Consider a time when someone was honest with you in a loving way. How did it make you feel?

Boundaries lead to healthy and fruitful relationships. There is integrity in a relationship where the needs of both parties are honored.

Boundaries are put in place for the well-being of the relationship and the support of both parties. They are necessary and will aid your relationships. Be intentional about establishing boundaries that honor and protect the joy of being in a relationship, and watch your relationships flourish!

I'm going to be generous in my assumptions and intentions while standing solidly in my integrity and being very clear about what's acceptable and what's not acceptable.

- Brene Brown

DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What was your understanding of boundaries prior to the video?
How has your understanding of boundaries changed as a result of this content?
2. What concept from the video will be most helpful to you in setting healthy boundaries and experiencing their benefits?
3. Who is a role model in your life who sets and keeps good boundaries?
4. Discuss the process of setting a healthy boundary.
5. Share any experience you've had with establishing and communicating a healthy boundary. What happened? How did people react? What benefits resulted from the boundary you established?
6. Personal boundaries tell you what is and is not okay and in a relationship. Think about two people in your life, and describe the boundaries you have with each one. How are they similar, and how are they different?
7. In your experience, what are the signs of a healthy relationship? What sort of boundaries might you see in a healthy relationship?

PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, OR MORE TO CONSIDER

1. Values are the things that are most important to you. Ideally, your boundaries will reflect your values. For example, if you value family, you might set boundaries at work that will protect your family time.
 - Take time to consider what your most important values are and make note of them.
 - Next, evaluate what boundaries are in place or might be needed in your relationships to reflect these values.
 - Try defining a boundary you need to set, using “I need,” “I expect,” or “I want to” to clarify your needs and expectations. For example:

I want to keep my personal life separate from my connections at work. When conversations turn personal, I will politely steer them back to work-related subjects or not get involved. I expect my colleagues to respect my privacy.

2. Discuss setting and implementing healthy boundaries in the following scenarios:

Scenario One: You’ve planned an outdoor lunch with your family. The restaurant has a strict ten-minute window for holding reservations, and a family member is known for their lateness.

Possible response: *Before the day of the lunch, you might say, “I want to remind everyone that the restaurant will only hold our reservation for ten minutes. It’s important we are all on time to enjoy our meal together. If anyone thinks they’ll be late, please let me know in advance so we can tell the restaurant.”*

Your preferred response:

Scenario Two: A person you are coming alongside as a supportive friend frequently asks for your advice on personal matters, such as their marriage. During a conversation, they mention considering separation from their partner.

Possible response: *“I care about you and want to support you, but I feel uncomfortable giving advice on such personal matters. It might be more helpful to talk to a professional who can provide the guidance you’re looking for.”*

Your preferred response:

BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

Situation Three: You discover a friend is sharing your personal information with their family or friends.

Possible response: *"I've heard that you have been sharing some of my personal information with others. I want to keep certain things private, and it's important to me that my privacy is respected. Let's agree to keep our conversations between us, or please ask me if you think you should share something."*

Your preferred response:

Work through several commonly occurring examples with your own family or relationships you have.

Situation:

Your preferred response:

Situation:

Your preferred response:

3. Group Boundary Setting Exercise (Positive Psychology.com)

This exercise provides an opportunity to practice using body language and speech to set boundaries with others in a group setting.

You need a space big enough for participants to move freely and two facilitators (one to lead and one to support). Allow 10-12 minutes for the exercise and 3-5 minutes to debrief.

Instructions:

Ask the participants to line up in two rows about five meters apart, facing each other. Ensure everyone is paired with someone from the opposite row. Each row will take turns advancing towards the other, and then being stopped.

Step One: Setting a boundary using body language

Instruct row one as follows:

“Everyone in row 1, pick a spot on the floor that you do not want to be crossed. Keep the location to yourself. When I say, ‘go,’ the people in row 2 will walk toward you. When that person reaches the spot you’ve picked, use your body language to indicate you don’t want them to come any closer. Here are some examples of how to do this.”

Demonstrate body language examples such as raising one hand, turning your back, or walking away.

Instruct row two as follows:

“When you see your counterpart in row one has set their boundary with you, you will respect the boundary and stop walking.”

Allow each group to take a turn practicing this skill.

Step Two: Setting a boundary using voice and body language

This time, participants will use their voice in addition to their body language to indicate to their counterparts to stop coming closer.

Demonstrate some examples of things to say, including *“stop,” “back off,”* or *“you’re too close.”*

Some participants will be louder or quieter than others, so this round can be repeated to encourage participants who are quieter to practice being louder, and participants who are louder to practice being quiet yet firm.

3. Group Boundary Setting Exercise (cont.)

Step Three: Reinforcing a boundary that has been crossed using voice and body language

This time, participants walking toward the boundary-setter will continue past the designated stopping point, and the boundary-setter practices resetting their boundary using a combination of body language.

Demonstrate a combination of raising a hand and saying “*Back off,*” turning their back and saying “*Stop,*” or walking away and saying “*You’re too close.*”

Debrief Questions

When both groups have practiced all three rounds, ask participants to thank their partners. Ask the group:

- What was hard?
- What was easy?
- How did it make you feel?

Adapted from Dr. Jo Nash. (2022). Home Alive.

<http://www.teachhomealive.org/curriculum/iv-boundary-setting/across-the-room/>

4. Recognizing Unhealthy Boundaries

Recognizing the signs that appropriate boundaries are not in place is essential. Potential indicators include:

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling resentful of people asking for our help
- Avoiding calls and interactions with others in case they ask for something
- Making comments about helping people and not receiving anything in return
- Feeling burned out
- Regularly daydreaming about dropping everything and running away
- Having no time for ourselves

Typically, unhealthy boundaries create opportunities and conditions for frustration, anger, mistrust, and resentment. They usually take one of the following forms:

1. **Nonexistent boundaries:** For example, sharing personal or intimate details with anyone who will listen, letting others make decisions for you, or accepting disrespectful or abusive behavior.
2. **Weak or poorly expressed boundaries:** For example, spending no time apart from a partner, being unable to say no, or supporting unhealthy habits that keep people codependent.
3. **Rigid boundaries:** For example, putting walls up to protect ourselves from others, keeping our distance to avoid getting hurt, or believing we don't need anyone.

From *Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself*. Nedra Glover Tawwab, 2021:

5. 5 questions to ask yourself to help clarify what you need when setting boundaries:

1. **What's happening?**

Take a moment to observe what is actually happening in the situation. What is the sequence of events, and what are your senses picking up? There is no judgment or analysis in this stage, it's meant to help you observe what is occurring objectively. Once you establish the facts about what's going on, you move to the next question.

BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

2. **Am I comfortable with this interaction?**

This is where you determine your feelings about what's happening. This may differ based on who you are and who you're encountering. We often have different boundaries based on our familiarity and relationships with people. Perhaps you don't mind if Person A calls you a nickname, but you don't like it when Person B does. That's valid! Is your intuition sparked? You don't have to stay in a conversation or interaction with anyone if you're feeling uncomfortable. Determining your comfort level may give you the space to evaluate how to respond to the person or have a longer conversation with this person about it later.

3. **How close is this person? (Distance and relationship)**

Someone's physical proximity to you is important to identify from a personal safety point of view. If the person is within enough distance to touch you (about 3 ft) and you're feeling uncomfortable, one of your boundaries (and safety measures) may be to create more space between you. Part of this question also refers to your relationship with this person because, as mentioned above, our response often varies based on who they are. Identifying the relationship can help you decide the best course of action for your situation.

4. **What outcome do I want to see?**

This is an honest check-in with yourself about your best-case scenario for the interaction. Once you can determine what outcome you want to see, you can start evaluating your options that can help you get there. Which brings us to the last question.

5. **What can I do?**

With all the information you gathered about your situation, you now get to determine how to respond. These can range from setting a boundary to removing yourself from the situation entirely (if possible). Your choices will vary because our world and relationships are dynamic. You are the best person to decide what is right for you based on your assessment of the events, just as if you were assessing a trail or waterway for safety before continuing. Options allow us to interact with the world from a place of confidence instead of fear.

BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

Boundary setting is a lifelong journey. Unlike outdoor adventures or trips, which often have a clear beginning and ending, boundary setting is more like interacting with nature itself. Nature is in a constant state of change, and we may be faced with circumstances we weren't expecting, e.g., encountering wildlife, equipment failure, or inclement weather. As such, some days you may have an easy time determining how to respond to a boundary violation, and other days it may be difficult. No matter where you are on this confidence journey, you're on the right path. Boundary setting takes practice, and it's possible to reach a point where you can identify your boundaries and take action with greater ease. When those days come, I hope you'll look in the mirror with confidence and say to yourself, "I'm worth speaking up for and my voice matters!"

From "5 Questions To Ask When Setting Boundaries," Nicole Snell, CEO, Girls Fight Back. Nicole Snell is an award-winning international speaker, facilitator, and self-defense expert specializing in sexual assault and violence prevention education, gender-based violence prevention, and boundary setting. She is the CEO of Girls Fight Back, Founder of Outdoor Defense, and Lead Instructor with both IMPACT Personal Safety and IMPACT Global. She is also an NACP Credentialed Victim Advocate and a credentialed Empowerment Self-Defense Professional.

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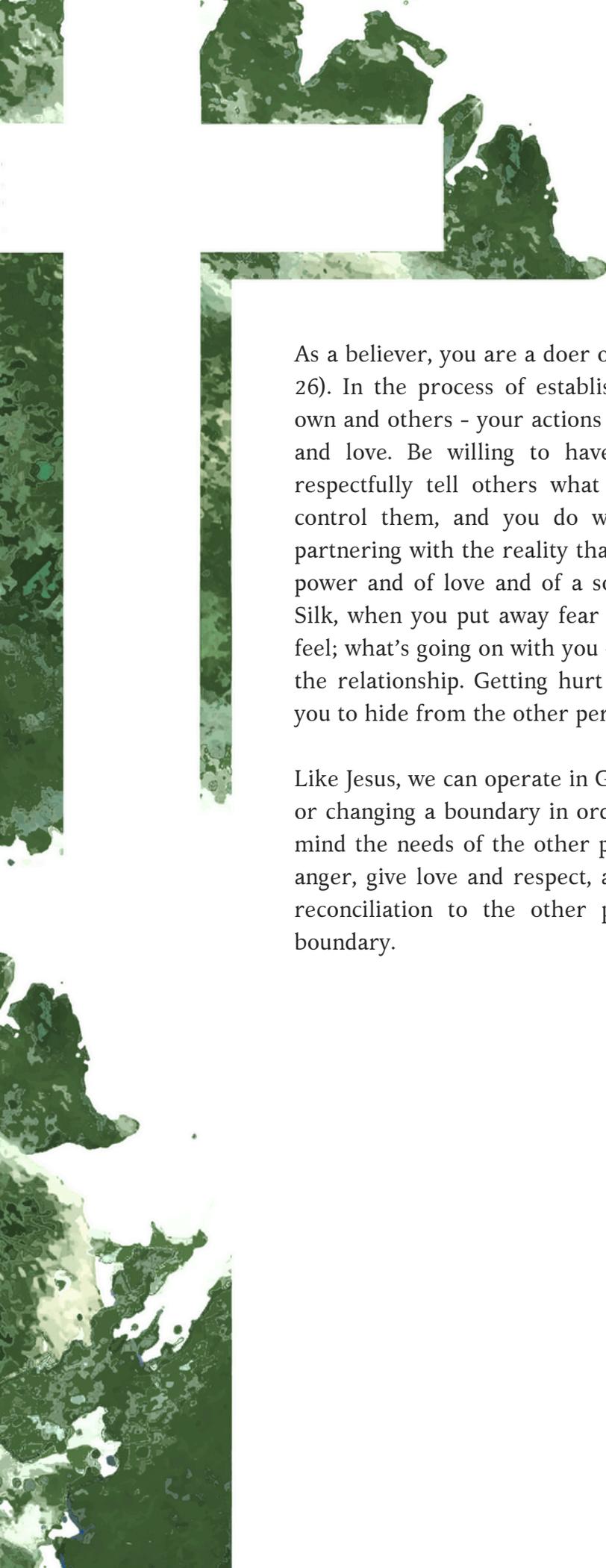
Christ-Centered Corner

Encouragement From a Christian Perspective

You have been created by God and uniquely fashioned and equipped for the good works He has prepared in advance for you. In order for you to fully step into all He created you to be, God will direct your priorities through His Word and Holy Spirit. Jesus, as our model, said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”

In order to protect your God-given priorities, you must have healthy boundaries in place. Without that protection, other people’s needs will dictate what gets done, rather than the leading of Holy Spirit. Consider Acts 6:2-4, where the Twelve summoned the large group of disciples and asked them to seek out “seven men of good reputation, full of Holy Spirit and wisdom” to appoint over the serving of tables so that the apostles could continue to focus on their priority of prayer and preaching the Gospel. We are not called to help everybody with everything. The Greek word seen throughout the NT and translated as “salvation” or “saved” means, “to save, heal, deliver; to be made whole.” Healthy boundaries will help you remain the whole, healthy, and unique individual God intended you to be.

The boundaries you set as a believer must be based on your identity in Christ and the roles into which He has called you. They will take into consideration the levels of intimacy that are wise for the relationship you have with the other person. Access to Jesus’ heart requires that we lay down our lives and follow Him - taking time to listen to Him and be surrendered to His Word. He is our highest priority and occupies our core - the circle of greatest intimacy. The next level would be your most intimate earthly relationship, such as your spouse, or if unmarried, a parent, sibling, or life-long friend. As you move out to relationships with decreasing levels of intimacy, your boundaries should reflect the level of relationship and intimacy with different levels of access to your heart, your time, and your resources. This will communicate to the people closest to you the value you have for them, it will protect your priorities, and it will protect your ability to love well.



As a believer, you are a doer of the Word and not just a hearer (James 1:22-26). In the process of establishing and respecting boundaries - both your own and others - your actions and your words must be consistent with truth and love. Be willing to have hard conversations. When you choose to respectfully tell others what you are going to do rather than trying to control them, and you do what you say you are going to do; you are partnering with the reality that “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (II Tim 1:7). According to Danny Silk, when you put away fear and put on love and tell the truth - how you feel; what’s going on with you - your freedom is restored and trust is built in the relationship. Getting hurt and choosing to remain offended may cause you to hide from the other person and be robbed of your freedom.

Like Jesus, we can operate in God’s love in every moment. Even while setting or changing a boundary in order to protect your priorities, you can keep in mind the needs of the other person and recognize their value. Rather than anger, give love and respect, and always hold out hope for restoration and reconciliation to the other person as they choose to respond to your boundary.

