

Boundaries in Marriage

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A Tale of Two Couples

- Most of us have no greater desire and prayer than a lifetime of love and commitment to one person with whom we can share life. Marriage is one of God's greatest gifts to humanity. It is the mystery of living as one flesh with another human being (Ephesians 5:31-32).
- Marriage is first and foremost about love. It is bound together by the care, need, companionship, and values of two people, which can overcome hurt, immaturity, and selfishness to form something better than what each person alone can produce. Love is at the heart of marriage, as it is at the heart of God himself (1 John 4:16).
- Yet, love is not enough. The marriage relationship needs other ingredients to grow and thrive. Those ingredients are *freedom* and *responsibility*. When two people are free to disagree, they are free to love. When they are not free, they live in fear, and love dies: "Perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). And when two people together take responsibility to do what is best for the marriage, love can grow. When they do not, one takes on too much responsibility and resents it; the other does not take on enough and becomes self-centered or controlling. Freedom and responsibility problems in a marriage will cause love to struggle.
- When people grow in character, they grow in the ability to set and receive boundaries in their marriages, and they mature. When they resist hearing the word *no*, they remain immature.
- Many people believe that as we humans grow up physically, we automatically grow up emotionally as well, but that's simply not true. Age is a necessary but insufficient requirement for growing up. There are immature old people, and there are appropriately mature young people.
- Today is the day to work on your own boundaries in marriage. As the Bible teaches, make the most of today, for the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16). What you take initiative to deal with today will affect the rest of your married life. And what you ignore or are afraid to address will do the same.
- *Boundaries in Marriage* is not about fixing, changing, or punishing your mate. If you aren't in control of yourself, the solution is not learning to control someone else. The solution is learning self-control, one of the nine fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). So don't look at this book as a way to make someone else grow up. It is more about taking ownership of your own life so that you are protected and you can love and protect your spouse without enabling or rescuing him or her.

Chapter One- What's a Boundary, Anyway?

The Importance of Boundaries

- The issues are different for many couples, but the perplexity is often the same. One spouse feels something is missing, but she can't figure out what it is. She tries to do the right things. She gives, sacrifices, honors the commitment, and believes the best. And yet she doesn't achieve intimacy, or worse than that, she doesn't avoid pain.

- In some cases, the confusion hides itself behind the simplistic explanations that problems such as addiction, irresponsibility, control, or abuse provide.
- In other cases, there may be no “problems,” but the marriage does not live up to the promise that one or both of the partners had in the beginning. Commitment may be strong, but love, intimacy, and deep sharing are not present. Why does this happen with two people who are so committed to the relationship?
- When boundaries are not established in the beginning of a marriage, or when they break down, marriages break down as well. Or such marriages don’t grow past the initial attraction and transform into real intimacy. They never reach the true “knowing” of each other and the ongoing ability to abide in love and to grow as individuals and as a couple—the long-term fulfillment that was God’s design. For this intimacy to develop and grow, there must be boundaries.
- What *is* a boundary? In the simplest sense, a boundary is a property line. It denotes the beginning and end of something.

Ownership

- In relationships, ownership is also very important. If I know where the boundaries are in our relationship, I know who “owns” things such as feelings, attitudes, and behaviors as well. I know to whom they “belong.” And if there is a problem with one of those, I know to whom the problem belongs as well. A relationship like marriage requires each partner to have a sense of ownership of himself or herself.
- The first way in which clarifying boundaries helps us is to know where one person ends and the other begins. What is the problem, and where is it? Is it in you, or is it in me? Once we know the boundaries, we know who should be owning whichever problem we are wrestling with.

Responsibility

- Boundaries help us to determine who is responsible for what. If we understand who owns what, we then know who must take responsibility for it.
- If we can discover who is responsible for what, we have an opportunity for change. If we can see that the problem is our problem and that we are responsible for it, then we are in the driver’s seat of change. For the first time, we are empowered.
- Responsibility also involves action. If something is going to happen, it’s going to happen because we take action. We need to change some attitudes, or behaviors, or reactions, or choices. We must actively participate in the resolution of whatever relational problem we might have, even if it is not our fault.
- Each spouse must take responsibility for the following things:
 - Feelings
 - Attitudes
 - Behaviors
 - Choices
 - Limits
 - Desires
 - Thoughts
 - Values
 - Talents
 - Love

- Responsibility tells us we are the ones who must work through our feelings and learn how to feel differently. *Our* attitudes-not those of our spouse-cause us to feel distressed and powerless. How we behave and react is part of the problem and we have to change these patterns. We allow ourselves to get pushed beyond certain limits and then become resentful or powerless. We do not turn desires into accomplished goals, or we do not deal with our sick desires.
- Responsibility empowers us to have a good life. To give Adam and Eve the responsibility God gave them was to empower them to have the life all of us desire-one filled with love, wonderful surroundings, and lots of opportunities to use our abilities and talents. He gave them the ability and the opportunity to make the life they chose. When they did not choose in a life-giving way, they also bore the responsibility for that choice as well, just as we do.
- But the good news of boundaries is that God's plan of responsibility has not changed. We are not at the mercy of our spouse's behavior or problems. Each spouse can act both to avoid being a victim of the other spouse's problems and, better yet, *to change the marriage relationship itself*. The process always begins with taking responsibility for your own part in the problem.

Freedom

- God designed the entire creation for freedom. We were not meant to be enslaved by each other; we were meant to love each other freely. God designed us to have freedom of choice as we responded to life, to other people, to God, and to ourselves. But when we turned from God, we lost our freedom. We became enslaved to sin, to self-centeredness, to other people, to guilt, and to a whole host of other dynamics.
- Boundaries help us to realize our freedom once again. Listen to the way that Paul tells the Galatians to set boundaries against any type of control and become free: "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1)
- God tells us to not be subject to any kind of enslaving control at all.

The Triangle of Boundaries

- Three realities have existed since the beginning of time:
 1. Freedom
 2. Responsibility
 3. Love
- God created us free. He gave us responsibility for our freedom. And as responsible free agents, we are told to love him and each other. This emphasis runs throughout the whole Bible. When we do these three things-live free, take responsibility for our own freedom, and love God and each other-then life, including marriage, can be an Eden experience.
- Something incredible happens as these three ingredients of relationship work together. As love grows, spouses become more free from the things that enslave: self-centeredness, sinful patterns, past hurts, and other self-imposed limitations. Then, they gain a greater and greater sense of self-control and responsibility. As they act more responsibly, they become more loving. And then the cycle begins all over again. As love grows so does freedom, leading to more responsibility, and to more love.
- This is why a couple who has been married for fifty or more years can say that the marriage gets better and better as time goes on. They become more free to be themselves as a result of being loved, and the love relationship deepens.

- Where there is no freedom, there is slavery, and where there is slavery, there will be rebellion. Also, where there is no responsibility, there is bondage. Where we do not take ownership and do what we are supposed to do with our own stuff, we will be stuck at a certain level of relationship, and we will not be able to go deeper.
- Love can only exist where freedom and responsibility are operating. Love creates more freedom that leads to more responsibility, which leads to more and more ability to love.

Protection

- You need protective boundaries that you can put up when evil is present and can let down when the danger is over.

Self-Control

- There is a lot of misunderstanding about boundaries. Some people are against boundaries because they see them as selfish; other people actually use them to be selfish. Both are wrong. Boundaries are basically about self-control.
- My client could not say to her husband, “You can’t speak to me that way.” This demand is unenforceable. But she could say what she would or would not do if he spoke to her that way again. She could set a boundary “on herself.” She could say, “If you speak to me that way, I will walk out of the room.” This threat is totally enforceable because it has to do with *her*. She would be setting a boundary with the only person she could control: herself.
- If someone trespasses your personal boundaries in some way, you can take control of yourself and not allow yourself to be controlled, or hurt, anymore. This is self-control.
- And ultimately, self-control serves love, not selfishness. We hope that when you take control of yourself, you will love better and more purposefully and intentionally so that you and your spouse can have the intimacy you desire.

Examples of Boundaries

- God has equipped us with special boundaries for the interpersonal realm.

Words

- The most basic boundary is language. Your words help define you. They tell the other person who you are, what you believe, what you want, and what you don’t. Here are some examples of words being used as boundaries:
 - No, I don’t want to do that.
 - No, I won’t participate in that.
 - Yes, I want to do that.
 - I will.
 - I like that.
 - I don’t like that.
- Your words, or lack of them, define you to another person.

Truth

- Truth is another important boundary. God's truth and principles provide the boundaries of our existence, and as we live within this truth, we are safe. Here are some truths that help define the structure of how we are to relate:
 - Do not lie.
 - Do not commit adultery.
 - Do not covet.
 - Give to others.
 - Love one another.
 - Be compassionate.
 - Forgive.
- As we structure our relationships around God's eternal truths, our relationships succeed and thrive. When we cross these boundaries, we lost the security that truth provides.
- In addition, being honest and truthful about ourselves and what is going on in a relationship provides boundaries. Not being truthful to one another gives a false impression of where we are, as well as who we are.
- If we are not being truthful with each other, our real relationship goes into hiding. Then, instead of one real relationship, we have two relationships: the outside relationship, which is false; and the inside, hidden relationship, which is true. Intimacy is lost, and so is love. Love and truth must exist together.

Consequences

- God has given us the Law of Sowing and Reaping to communicate what is acceptable and what is not. If we just use words, others sometimes do not "get the message." In fact, people in denial are deaf to words of truth. They only respond to pain and loss. Consequences show where our boundary line is.
- Some spouses need severe consequences like separation. Others need less severe ones, like the following, to define important boundaries:
 - Canceling a credit card
 - Leaving for the party alone when the perpetually late partner doesn't come home by the agreed upon departure time
 - Going ahead and eating dinner when a spouse is late for the thousandth time
 - Ending an abusive conversation
 - Refusing to bail someone out of a jam because of perpetual irresponsibility, like overspending or not completing work on time.

Emotional Distance

- Sometimes one of the partners in a hurtful relationship is not willing to change. The partner continues to do hurtful things. Or, sometimes a spouse may have betrayed a trust or had an affair, and even though he has repented, not enough time has passed for the spouse to prove himself trustworthy.
- In these situations, trust may not be wise. But it is prudent to continue to interact in the relationship and to work the problem out. Guarding one's heart might include saying the following:
 - I love you, but I don't trust you. I can't be that close until we work this out.
 - When you can be kind, we can be close again.
 - When you show you are serious about getting some help, I will feel safe enough to open up to you again.
 - I can't share deep feelings if you are going to punish me for them.

- In these instances, the couple has a commitment to work on things along with the wisdom to guard the heart with some emotional distance until it is safe and prudent to move closer. This prevents further hurt and deterioration of the relationship.
- We caution you, however, that you must take this stance only with a pure heart. Impure hearts use boundaries to act out feelings such as revenge and anger. Because none of us is pure, we have to search our motives for establishing boundaries to make sure that they serve love and not our impure motives. Using distance or withdrawal of love, for example, to punish the other is a sign that we are setting boundaries not to resolve the conflict, but to get revenge.

Physical Distance

- Sometimes, when all else fails, people must get away from each other until the hurt can stop. Distance can provide time to protect, time to think, time to heal, and time to learn new things. In severe cases, protective separation prevents actual danger. Physical distance can be minimal, or more significant:
 - Removing oneself from an argument or heated situation
 - Taking some time away from one another to sort things out
 - Moving out to get treatment for an addiction
 - Separating from physical abuse or substance abuse
 - Moving into a shelter to protect children
- These boundaries protect the marriage and the spouse from further harm.

Other People

- God has always provided help from his family to those who need it. Here are some ways:
 - Use a third party to help you resolve conflict.
 - Use a third party to help you protect and support yourself.
 - Use a group for healing and strengthening.
 - Use others to teach you boundaries.
 - Use counselors, friends, or pastors to provide the safe place to work on difficult issues.
 - Use shelters in extreme situations.
- Take care, however, that other people are helping and not hurting. Other people may be unhelpful if they help you hide from conflict instead of trying to resolve it.

Time

- Time is another boundary that structures difficulties in relationships. Some people need time to work out a conflict or to limit the conflict itself:
 - Give yourself an allotted time to talk about certain things: “We will discuss our budget for one hour, and then we will leave it alone until next week.”
 - Set a certain time to work on a particular issue instead of discussing it in the heat of the moment.
 - Establish seasons for certain goals: “This summer we will work on our communication, and in the fall work on our sexual difficulties.”
- Boundaries are only built and established in the context of relationship. To run from a relationship as the first step of boundaries is not to have boundaries at all. It is a defense against developing boundaries with another person. The only place boundaries are real is within relationship.

Chapter Two- Applying the Ten Laws of Boundaries to Marriage

Law #1: The Law of Sowing and Reaping

- The Law of Sowing and Reaping, simply put, means that *our actions have consequences*. When we do loving, responsible things, people draw close to us. When we are unloving or irresponsible, people withdraw from us by emotionally shutting down, or avoiding us, or eventually leaving the relationship.
- God designed marriage to be a place not only of love, but of growth. One pathway to growth is learning that actions have consequences. Since marriage is such a close, long-term relationship, spouses deeply affect each other with their actions. It is an act of love to allow our spouse to reap the effects of his selfishness or irresponsibility-unless, of course, we are acting out of revenge or a desire to see our spouse suffer.
- Boundaries are the key to obeying this Law of Sowing and Reaping. When we set and keep limits with our spouse, we are saying to him, “I may love you, but I’m not paying for your problems.” Refusing to rescue your spouse-such as by refusing to cheer him up when he is pouting, sacrificing to pay off his credit card bill, calling in sick for him when he has been out partying the night before-helps keep the problem with him.
- This first law is played out in the two main areas of marriage: relationship and function. The *relational* part of marriage involves the emotional tie two people have to each other, such as how deeply connected they are and how they feel about each other, both positively and negatively. The *functional* part of marriage has to do with the “doing” aspects of the relationship, such as paying bills, managing time, cooking meals, keeping house, and rearing children.
- In the relational aspect of marriage, sowing and reaping has to do with how spouses affect and impact each other’s heart.
- In the functional aspect, sowing and reaping is more easily identifiable, because tasks are more concrete. For example, a husband may sow overspending, while his wife reaps the result by having to get a job, or by scrimping on food and other necessities to meet the family budget. Or a wife may sow careless housekeeping, while her husband reaps discomfort in his own home and embarrassment when company comes over.
- In either aspect, the problem is the same: *The one who has the problem isn’t facing the effects of the problem*. And things don’t change in a marriage until the spouse who is taking responsibility for a problem that is not hers decides to say or do something about it.

Law #2: The Law of Responsibility

- The Law of Responsibility is this: We are responsible *to* each other, but not *for* each other. The Bible teaches it this way. “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” and “each one should carry his own load” (Galatians 6:2,5). The word *burden* indicates a back-breaking boulder, such as a financial, health, or emotional crisis. Spouses actively support each other when one is carrying an overwhelming burden. The term *load*, however, indicates one’s daily responsibilities of life. This includes one’s feelings, attitudes, values, and handling of life’s everyday difficulties. Spouses may help each other out with loads, but ultimately, each person must take care of his own daily responsibilities.
- Two extremes occur in marriage when the Law of Responsibility is not obeyed. On the one hand, a husband will neglect his responsibility to love his wife. He may become selfish, inconsiderate, or hurtful. He will not consider how his actions affect and influence his mate. He is not following Jesus’ law of how to treat one another: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12). This is being irresponsible to a spouse.

- On the other hand, a husband may take on responsibility his wife should be bearing. For example, his wife may be unhappy, and he may feel responsible for her happiness. Perhaps he feels that he isn't making enough money, showing enough interest in her activities, or helping enough around the house. So he tries and tries to make an unhappy person happy. This is an impossible project. While a husband should be sympathetic toward his unhappy wife and take responsibility for his own hurtful behavior, he shouldn't take responsibility for her feelings. They are hers, and she must handle them herself.
- Finally, the Law of Responsibility also means that spouses refuse to rescue or enable the sinful or immature behavior of their partners. Couples have a duty to set limits on each spouse's destructive acts or attitudes.

Law #3: The Law of Power

- Couples struggle with understanding what they have the power to change in their marriages. More often than not, they are concerned with changing not their own behavior, but their spouse's. Human nature lends itself to trying to change and fix others so that we can be more comfortable.
- If you don't have power to change your spouse, what *do* you have power over? You have the power to confess, submit, and repent of your own hurtful ways in your marriage. You can identify these hurtful ways, ask God for his help to overcome them, and be willing to change. Whatever your spouse does that bothers you, it's certain that you do things that bother him also. If you want your spouse to listen to your boundaries, ask him where you may be violating his.
- You have the power to grow through the unhelpful ways you are dealing with your marriage problems. You have the power to start identifying ways you are actively or passively contributing to the problem, and you have the power to change your time. Jesus called this process taking the plank out of our eye first (Matthew 7:1-5).

Law #4: The Law of Respect

- The Law of Respect states that if we wish for others to respect our boundaries, we need to respect theirs.
- The Law of Respect fosters love. Loving your mate means desiring and protecting her freedom of choice. It means dying to your wish for her to see things your way and appreciating that she has her own mind, values, and feelings.
- Apply the Law of Respect in your marriage. Don't storm into the living room with a list of "how things are going to change around this house." Tell your spouse you want your boundaries respected, and ask him if he feels his are being respected also. Let him know that you value and desire him to be free to say no, even if you don't like the answer. Ask him some of the following questions:
 - How might I be crossing your boundaries?
 - Do you feel I respect your right to say no to me?
 - Will you let me know the next time I don't respect your freedom?
- These humbling and uncomfortable questions show you are concerned for your spouse more than for your own convenience. They arise out of self-sacrifice, and they show your generosity of spirit and love. And they can bind your marriage together.
- If your spouse is untrustworthy, you may feel you are putting yourself in the hands of someone who might use your respect for him against you. However, even untrustworthy people need to have their legitimate needs and boundaries respected. This doesn't mean, though, allowing yourself to be harmed if the spouse is unsafe. Respect his boundaries and still set limits on his untrustworthiness.

- Respecting and valuing your mate's boundaries is the key to being close and loving. Your spouse experiences the gift of freedom from you and sees the love you are extending in giving this freedom. When you respect your spouse's boundaries, you are paving the way to having yours respected.

Law #5: The Law of Motivation

- The Law of Motivation states that we must be free to say no before we can wholeheartedly say yes. No one can actually love another if he feels he doesn't have a choice not to. Giving your time, love, or vulnerability to your spouse requires that you make your own choice based on your values, not out of fear.
- *Having* to do anything is a sign that someone is afraid. The following fears prevent a spouse from setting boundaries in marriage:
 - Fear of losing love
 - Fear of a spouse's anger
 - Fear of being alone
 - Fear of being a bad person
 - Fear of one's guilty feelings
 - Fear of not reciprocating the love someone has given (thus hurting his or her feelings)
 - Fear of losing the approval of others
 - Fear of hurting one's spouse because of overidentifying with his or her pain
- Fear always works against love. The "have to" destroys the "choose to." Conversely, love drives out fear (1 John 4:18). When we are freely choosing to love, we are no longer driven by the above fears. We are driven by affection. If you struggle with any of these fears, work on maturing through them, so that they do not control you and rob you of your boundaries.
- To the extent that you are free to say no, you are free to say yes to something your spouse wants. This is why sometimes in marriage it is a good growth practice to say, "I can't wholeheartedly say yes to this, so I'll have to say no at this time." This gives you time and space to work out what the best option truly is. It also saves your spouse from a resentful, withdrawn mate. No spouse in his right mind really wants a mate who complies with his wishes out of fear. He does not experience love, openness, or freedom from her. She may be there in body, but not in soul. The Law of Motivation helps keep fear out of the picture.

Law #6: The Law of Evaluation

- *Just because someone is in pain doesn't necessarily mean something bad is happening.* Something good might be going on, such as a spouse learning to grow up. And this is the essence of the Law of Evaluation: We need to evaluate the pain our boundaries cause others. Do they cause pain that leads to injury? Or do they cause pain that leads to growth?
- It is unloving to set limits with a spouse to harm him. This is revenge, which is in God's hands, not ours (Romans 12:19). But it can be just as unloving to avoid setting a limit with your spouse because you don't want him to be uncomfortable. Sometimes discomfort is an opportunity for growth. You may need to confront your spouse, give him a warning, or set a consequence. Do not neglect setting limits in your marriage because of a fear of causing pain. Pain can be the best friend your relationship has ever had.

Law #7: The Law of Proactivity

- The Law of Proactivity is taking action to solve problems based on your values, wants, and needs. Proactive people solve problems without having to blow up. They “are” their boundaries, so they don’t have to “do” a boundary as often as reactive folks do.
- The Law of Proactivity has three facets: (1) *Reactive boundaries are a necessary part of growth and marriage.* Many people who have been victimized or powerless need the freedom that comes from strenuously protesting some evil or bad thing. At the same time, (2) *reactive boundaries are not sufficient for growth.* Impulsive screaming matches aren’t adult behaviors. Love can be lost, and a lot of damage can be done when a spouse doesn’t grow out of her “victim” role of constant protest. That is why (3) *proactive boundaries maintain love, freedom, and reality in relationships.* Proactive people keep their freedom, and they disagree and confront issues all the time in marriage. But they are able to hold on to the love they have for their spouse, and they do not get caught up in an emotional storm. They have worked through their reactive stage.

Law #8: The Law of Envy

- The most powerful obstacle to setting boundaries in marriage is envy. The Law of Envy states that we will never get what we want if we focus outside of our boundaries on what others have. Envy is devaluing what we have, thinking it’s not enough. We then focus on what others have, all the while resenting them for having good things we don’t possess.
- Do not confuse envy with desire. Desire involves wanting something, and it motivates us to take action to possess it. God wants to give us our desires (Psalm 37:4). Desire doesn’t focus on our emptiness, nor how lucky others seem to be. Desire preserves the goodness and value of what we have and of those we are in relationship with.
- You can’t set limits in marriage until you are looking at yourself as part of the problem and as a great deal of the solution. Work through envy, own your problems, and take action.

Law #9: The Law of Activity

- The Law of Activity states that we need to take the initiative to solve our problems rather than being passive.
- All things being equal, active spouses have an edge in boundary setting. Taking initiative increases one’s chances to learn from mistakes. Active people make lots of mistakes, and wise ones grow from them (Hebrews 5:14). They try something, experience a limit, and adapt. They experience the depth of God’s forgiveness because they do things for which they need to be forgiven. Passive people have trouble learning because they are afraid to take risks. Because of this, they also have a harder time taking charge of their lives and boundaries. God is not pleased with those who “shrink back” in passivity (Hebrews 10:38). He wants his people to participate in life with him, not wait on the sidelines.
- When one spouse is active and the other passive, several problems can occur:
 - The active spouse may dominate the passive one.
 - The active spouse may feel abandoned by the passive one.
 - The passive spouse may become too dependent on the active one’s initiative.
 - The passive spouse may resent the power of the active one.
 - The passive spouse may be too intimidated by the active one to say no.
- When both spouses are active in boundary setting, when they both speak the truth, solve problems, and set goals, they will both grow. They can also rest in the security that if they don’t address a problem, their mate can be depended on to do it. Their love grows and deepens, as they are always moving toward each other. One is not constantly waiting for the other to take the first step. Don’t wait for your spouse to take the first step. Assume the first move is always yours. If you tend to be the passive spouse, let your

mate know how risky it is for you to take initiative, and ask her to help you become more active. You're in good company. This is how God does it. Even when he didn't cause a problem (our sinfulness), he took the initiative to solve it (the Cross).

Law #10: The Law of Exposure

- The Law of Exposure states that we need to communicate our boundaries to each other. God designed boundaries to promote love and truth. Spouses need to make clear what they do or don't want. They need to work on understanding what their spouse is saying about their boundaries. When boundaries are "exposed," two souls can be connected in the marriage. But when boundaries are unexposed, spouses are less emotionally present in the marriage, and love struggles.
- When we expose our boundaries to the light of relationship, we can be fully connected to our spouses. We can resolve problems, and we can take a stand to actively love our spouses by risking conflict for the sake of the relationship. Exposure is the only way for healing and growth to take place.

THE TEN LAWS OF BOUNDARIES

1. The Law of Sowing and Reaping: Our actions have consequences.
2. The Law of Responsibility: We are responsible *to* each other, but not *for* each other.
3. The Law of Power: We have power over some things; we don't have power over others (including changing people).
4. The Law of Respect: If we wish for others to respect our boundaries, we need to respect theirs.
5. The Law of Motivation: We must be free to say no before we can wholeheartedly say yes.
6. The Law of Evaluation: We need to evaluate the pain our boundaries cause others.
7. The Law of Proactivity: We take action to solve problems based on our values, wants, and needs.
8. The Law of Envy: We will never get what we want if we focus outside our boundaries onto what others have.
9. The Law of Activity: We need to take the initiative in setting limits rather than be passive.
10. The Law of Exposure: We need to communicate our boundaries to each other.

Chapter 3- Setting Boundaries with Yourself

Whose Problem is it Anyway?

- When you cease to blame your spouse and own the problem as yours, you are then empowered to make changes to solve *your* problem.
- The reality of boundaries in marriage is that *no matter what the issue in your marriage, you need to take the initiative to solve it.* You may have a spouse who
 - Is chronically late
 - Is financially irresponsible
 - Withdraws and avoids relationship
 - Becomes angry
 - Attempts to control you
- Though you may share no blame in creating these problems, you probably need to take some initiative in solving them. This often seems unfair to people. They will say, "Why should I have to solve a problem I didn't cause?" This is a legitimate question. However, the question exposes a demand for fairness that will never exist in a fallen

world. Such a question keeps people protesting and complaining while still mired in the problem.

- God sees it another way. He says that no matter who causes a problem, we are to take steps to solve it. If our brother has something against us, we are to go to him (Matthew 5:23-24). And at the same time, if our brother sins against us, we are to go to him (Matthew 18:15). Fault is irrelevant; we need to work to resolve the problem.

Removing the Plank

- Another reason we need to look first at our own boundaries on ourselves is that, more often than not, we aren't blameless.

Taking Ownership of Our Lives

- An important aspect of setting boundaries with ourselves is that of taking ownership of our lives. We need to take responsibility for our hearts, our loves, our time, and our talents. We are to own our lives and live in God's light, growing up and maturing our character along the way: "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). This is our job, and no one else's.
- We are more concerned about the person who is making us crazy or miserable than we are about the state of our own souls. Blaming someone else shifts the light of truth from us to someone else.
- When we neglect setting boundaries with ourselves and focus instead on setting boundaries with those we think sorely need limits, we have limited our own spiritual growth. As in any growth process, spiritual growth proceeds to the level that we invest in it. When we only invest in changing someone else, they get the benefit of our efforts, but the important work we have to do has been neglected.
- We must become more deeply concerned about our own issues than our spouse's. We cannot overstate the importance of this idea. One of the most frightening facts in existence is that God will someday call us to account for our lives here on earth. (2 Corinthians 5:10). At that meeting, we will not be able to blame, hide behind, or deflect to the sins and problems of our spouse. It will be a one-on-one conversation with God.
- Boundaries with yourself are a much bigger issue than boundaries in your marriage. In the end, while we are only partly responsible for growing our marriages, we are completely responsible to God for developing our very souls. You are responsible for half of your marriage and all of your soul. Boundaries on yourself are between you and God.

Being the "Good" Spouse

- In many marriages, one mate is more obviously selfish, irresponsible, withdrawn, or controlling. The other is perceived as a suffering saint, and people wonder how he tolerates the pain of living with such a problem person. This often makes it hard for the "good" spouse to set appropriate boundaries for himself.
- Second, the "good" spouse often feels helpless in the relationship. He has tried to love better and more, yet the problem continues. Because being 'good' generally means being caring and compassionate, he doesn't have access to other helpful tools, such as truthfulness, honesty, limits, and consequences.
- Third, the "good" spouse can easily take a morally superior position toward his spouse. Since his contributions to the problem may not be as obvious, he may think, *I am not capable of being as destructive as my mate*. This is a dangerous position to take. We are all capable of just about anything, due to our own sinful nature (Romans 3:10-18). We

need to be careful about this. Any time we focus on our goodness, we turn our hearts away from our need for love and forgiveness.

Living by the Same Rules

- We need to realize our need for limits because we need to submit ourselves to the same rules we want our partner to submit to. Submitting to the boundary process is the great equalizer in marriage and keeps both spouses in a mutual relationship instead of in a one-up or one-down one. Both need to accept and respect the limits of the other; no one plays God, doing what he wants and expecting the other to comply.

Freeing Your Spouse by Setting Limits on Yourself

- When you set limits on yourself, you create an environment in which your spouse can become free to choose and grow.
- The highest calling of a spouse is the call to love, just as it is the highest calling of our faith: loving God and each other (Matthew 22:37-40). Love means doing what you can for your spouse. And setting boundaries on your own character weaknesses is one of the most loving things you can do in your marriage. When you grow, you become more tender, more empathic, and yet more honest and firm in your convictions. You become someone who is better to live with.

Process, Not Perfection

- When we look at our own character issues, we cannot *will* ourselves to maturity. We don't have the power to change our spouse; nor can we change our destructive behaviors and attitudes by "just saying no."
- However, we do have some power and choices. We can choose to tell the truth about our faults. We can choose to bring those faults into the light of relationship. We can choose to repent of them and to work them out and mature them. Setting limits on ourselves sometimes simply involves taking a troublesome emotion, behavior, or attitude to a supportive relationship, instead of acting on it.
- Here are some character issues in our own lives on which we can set limits:
 - *Playing God*- By human nature, we try to play God instead of seeking him. We need to continually own this worst and most hurtful aspect of our character. By playing God, we miss the mark in loving, being responsible, and caring about the welfare of our spouse. Submit this part of yourself to God's authority. Let him know that the desire to play God is larger than your power to stop it, and ask for his help. Stay connected to the life of God and his people. Practice the spiritual disciplines of worship, prayer, fellowship, and Scripture reading.
 - *Denial*- When we do not admit the truth about who we are, we give our spouse no one with whom to connect. What we deny about ourselves is absent from love. If, for example, you deny your struggle with insecurity by attempting to be strong, your spouse cannot love and have compassion for your insecure parts. This impoverishes the marriage bond and prevents a deeper connection with your spouse.
 - *Withdrawal from Relationship*- Failing to make and keep emotional connections is a serious character issue. One or both spouses pull away and avoid being open and vulnerable with each other. Emotional isolation withdraws the most basic part of ourselves from the source of life: relatedness to God and others. Though the ideal of marriage is that all parts of one spouse connect to all parts of the other, most couples struggle with their tendency to withdraw their hearts from each other.

- *Irresponsibility*- Some of us have more difficulty with taking responsibility than others do. The inability to accept another's no indicates a difficulty in taking ownership of your own disappointment and sadness and a struggle in allowing others freedom. If you have problems with responsibility, here's what you can do to help:
 - Submit yourself to safe people who can confront you on your irresponsibility.
 - Accept both consequences and feedback for your problem. Tell others to stop enabling you.
 - Tell your spouse that his silence and/or nagging aren't helping you. Ask him to love you, but at the same time to provide limits for you when you don't set them on yourself.
- *Self-Centeredness*- Nothing is more natural than to think more of our own situation than another's. Marriage cannot be successfully navigated without our giving more of ourselves than we are comfortable giving. Yet self-absorbed people often attempt to live as a single person within marriage, thinking they can get what is important to them and still pull off the relationship. The result is that the spouse feels like an object, or feels that her own thoughts and feelings aren't valued. The structure of marriage itself is anti-selfish. Marriage exposes our weaknesses and failings to the other person. It shows us the limits to our goodness. It takes away the sense that everything revolves around us. And not addressing our own egocentrism can hurt. Here are some ideas to help set boundaries on your self-centeredness:
 - Ask your spouse to tell you when he doesn't feel that things are mutual between you, or when he thinks he has to constantly see reality your way.
 - Learn to let go of the demand to be perfect or special.
 - Say no to the urge to be "good," and learn the skills of forgiveness and grief.
- *Judgmentalism*- Many spouses struggle with judging, criticizing, and condemning others. If you have the "judge" role in your marriage, these tasks will help you grow out of this position:
 - Ask for feedback on how your attitude hurts those you love. Judgmental people are often surprised at how wounding they can be.
 - Become aware of your own attacking conscience. Most judging types have a very strict internal judge that punishes them. Learn to receive compassion and forgiveness from God and others for your own failings.
 - Develop compassion for the faults of others.

Boundaries on Our Attempts to Control

- Of all the aspects of ourselves we need to set limits on, our tendency to control our spouse is probably the most crucial. Ever since the Garden of Eden, we have tried to run each other's lives. The strategies, manipulations, and tactics spouses employ to change their mate are endless. And if there is any sure-fire way to destroy trust and love, control is it. We must give our love freely.
- How can you determine if someone is attempting control? Here are several indicators:
 - Not respecting the other's no. The husband will make several attempts to change the decision of his spouse and disregard her feelings.
 - Punishing a "wrong" choice. When the husband chooses to do something the wife doesn't like, the wife will act put out or like a victim, or she will accuse her husband of not being loving or caring.

- Not valuing freedom. The husband will be more interested in his wife's making the "right" decision, than in her free, heartfelt choice.
- Bad results. The wife who is being controlled will be resentful, act out, or retaliate.
- Below, look at some of the ways that couples attempt to control each other.
 - *Guilt*- Guilt messages are intended to make our spouse feel responsible for our welfare. In other words, guilt controls by creating the impression that our spouse's freedom injures us. By choosing differently from us, our spouse has thus been unloving.
 - *Anger*- Often, when one spouse wants something the other doesn't, the disappointed mate will become angry. Anger is our basic protest against the fact that we are not God and that we cannot control reality. Anger can be direct. It can be covert, as in passive-aggressive behaviors or sarcastic remarks. It can involve threats of retaliation. It can also, in extreme situations, become dangerous, as in abusive marriages.
 - *Persistent Assaults on the Spouse's Boundary*- One person will say no, then the spouse will make attempt after attempt to change the other's mind. Like a child who has learned to keep asking until he hears the answer he wants, the spouse refuses to live with the boundary of the other.
 - *Withholding Love*- Of all the ways we attempt to control, withholding love may be the most powerful. When one spouse disagrees, the other disconnects emotionally until the spouse changes to suit her. This is so powerful because God created us to need love and connection as our source of life. When someone withdraws this from us, we are without the basis of existence. It puts extreme pressure on us to do anything to connect to the one we love.

Submitting to Boundaries on Our Control

- The spouse who truly loves his mate and wants her to grow spiritually will, at some point, desire to give up these attempts to control. He will be willing to relinquish these strategies in favor of granting freedom and love. Here are some of the ways you can set limits on your controlling attempts.
 - *Realize the Cost of Other-Control*- The cost of other-control is that you might get external compliance, but lose your spouse's heart. Guilt, anger, assaults, and withholding all negate freedom and love. The spouse will go along, but will often be resentful or emotionally absent.
 - *Ask Your Spouse to Let You Know How Your Control Affects Him*- Since marriage is at its core a bond of empathy, your mate's feelings are important to you. Often, when the controlled spouse lets the controlling spouse know how hurtful and distant the attempts make him, the controlling spouse feels compassion for the pain and is able to better set limits on the control.
 - *Experience Your Own Helplessness to Change Your Spouse*- No matter how much you would like to believe the opposite, your spouse will not change her decisions, opinions, or feelings until she is ready to.
 - *Learn to Grieve*- Grief helps us to accept the truth and to let go of things we can't change or have. When you allow your spouse freedom, you will often feel loss and sadness about losing what you desired from him. Allowing yourself to feel this grief frees you to accept reality and find new ways to adapt to your marriage.
 - *Work Through Dependency Issues*- If your spouse is the only person through whom you can get needs met, you will have a bent toward controlling him. Find sources of love, approval, truth, or forgiveness that include your mate, but are not limited to him.

- *Be a Separate Person with Your Spouse*- Sometimes one mate will define herself by her mate and not be her own individual soul. Then, when her spouse disagrees or makes a different decision, she personalizes the difference as an attack against her. As you become more defined by your own boundaries, you will experience your mate's feelings and decisions as having more to do with him than with you. This will free you to allow him to be free.
- *Value Your Spouse's Freedom As You Want Your Freedom Valued*- Remember how it felt the last time someone attacked you for your freedom to choose and therefore have compassion on your spouse's choices.
- *Set Boundaries with Your Spouse Instead of Controlling Him*- Often, a wife will resort to control strategies because she feels unable to say no or be free with her husband. She may be afraid of her partner's reactions and may feel she can't protect herself. Control becomes a substitute for establishing boundaries of self-control with her spouse. As you set appropriate limits, you can feel safe and give up controlling your partner.
- As you can see, marriage has more to do with bringing yourself under the control of God and his principles than it does with controlling your spouse. However, as you relinquish control of your partner, you are able to better love him, protect your own freedom, and provide a context for both of you to grow.

Chapter 4- It Takes Two to Make One

"Twoness"

- The requirement for oneness is *two complete people*. The Bible defines a complete person as a mature person. A complete person is able to do all the things that adult life and relationship requires: give love and receive love, be independent and self-sufficient, live out values honestly, be responsible, have self-confidence, deal with problems and failures, live out their talents, and have a life. If two people who marry are complete, the oneness they establish will be complete. To the degree that either is less than complete as a person, the oneness will suffer under the strain of that incompleteness. The incomplete partner's longing for completeness will take precedence over what he is able to give to the relationship, and the relationship will suffer.
- So, if one or both are coming to the marriage asking the marriage to complete them as people, the marriage will break down. Marriage is not meant to be the place where one gets completed as a person. It is meant for complete persons to come together and build a "we" that is bigger and better than either one of the "I's" involved.
- As Frederick Buechner says in *Whistling in the Dark*, "A marriage made in Heaven is one where a man and a woman become more richly themselves together than the chances are either of them could ever have managed to become alone."
- For a marriage to work, two separate individuals need to have some elements of adulthood. No one has ever made it to adulthood ready for all that it requires. The good news is that you can grow toward this adulthood, or completeness, and as you do, your relationships will attain more and more oneness as well.

Completing Versus Complementing Each Other

- Marriage was not designed to complete a person. It was designed for two complete people to enter into and form something different than either of them is on his or her own. It was designed, not to make you a whole person, but to give your wholeness a new range of experience.

- But many people see marriage as a ticket to short-cut completeness, or maturity. Therefore they don't marry out of strength, but out of weakness. They marry someone to make up for what they do not possess on their own. They marry out of their incompleteness, and doing so erodes the possibility for oneness.
- The crucial element of "two becoming one" is that the two people must be complete in and of themselves-they must be adults-before they marry. This does not mean that the husband and wife possess all of the same talents and abilities, or even the same style. It does mean, however, that they possess all of adult functioning in key areas of personhood.
- He might not have her business acumen. She might not have his creativity or his ability to be the extroverted life of the party. This is not what we are talking about. These characteristics *complement* each other, not *complete* each other.
- Complementing means bringing different perspectives, talents, abilities, experiences, and other gifts to the relationship and forming a partnership.
- Completing means *making up for one's immaturity as a person*. It is an attempt to use another person to balance an imbalance in one's character, and it never works. Each person is responsible for developing these character imbalances on one's own and then bringing a whole, balanced self into the relationship.

Areas of Completeness That Marriage Cannot Provide

- As we said above, many times people will marry to make up for what they do not possess in their own character. This is often what is behind the head-over-heels, "falling in love" experience. Someone who is incomplete in some area will meet someone who has a strength in that area and feel an intoxicating "wholeness."
- Basic human requirements of character are not complements. They are essentials to being a complete person. Below is a partial list of abilities that both partners must possess and that cannot be "borrowed" from each other. The ability to
 - Connect emotionally
 - Be vulnerable and share feelings
 - Have an appropriate sense of power and assertiveness
 - Say no
 - Have initiative and drive
 - Have at least a minimal amount of organization
 - Be real, but not perfect
 - Accept imperfections and have grace and forgiveness
 - Grieve
 - Think for oneself and express one's opinions
 - Learn and grow
 - Take risks
 - Grasp and use one's talents
 - Be responsible and follow through
 - Be free and not controlled by external or internal factors
 - Be sexual
 - Be spiritual
 - Have a moral sense
 - Have an intellectual life
- These human abilities everyone possesses, although not everyone is able to express them. Make sure that the two of you develop these spiritual and human characteristics on your own. If you do, then you will each become a complete person, and the two of you can "become one."

Adults Take Responsibility for Their Treasures

- The first requirement of adults, or completed persons, is that they take responsibility for all of the treasures of their souls. If they don't, their marriage will stagnate to the degree that they disown aspects of their lives and then either blame the other or require the other to fix it or make up for it.

Requiring Ownership

- Codependency is taking responsibility for another person's problems and not requiring that person to take responsibility for his own.
- A mature, complete adult not only takes responsibility for himself, but also requires the same from the people he loves. To be codependent and not require responsibility from others is to not be responsible oneself.
- One of the greatest gifts we can give to each other is the gift of honesty and confrontation. As Proverbs tells us, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses" (Proverbs 27:6). We grow when someone who loves us "wounds" us by telling us painful truths we need to hear. Requiring responsibility from each other by telling each other the truth and not giving in to each other's immaturity is indeed a gift.

Adults Value Their Treasures and Those of Their Spouse

- We can't ignore aspects of our soul God has placed in us. Sooner or later, brushing them aside catches up with us.
- In the same way, we must value the treasures of our spouses. Mature people think of nurturing, developing, and taking care of the treasures of the people with whom they are in relationship. They are always thinking of how their loved ones are doing, how they are feeling, and how they could help them grow. Mature husbands and wives place a great value on the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes of their spouse.
- "Not wanting to miss out" is a good way to think of valuing the treasures of your spouse's soul. God has given you each other to know and to share. To value the treasures in the soul of the other is to not miss out on a wonderful gift from God to the both of you. This process of valuing others' treasures is something that mature people do and is part of being a complete person. It also acknowledges the separateness and completeness of the other person. It says "I know you are a person, too, and I am interested in the person you are."

Adults Understand the Concept of "You Are Not Me"

- The concept of "you are not me" is one of the most important aspects of boundaries. We all need to overcome the basic egocentricity of life, the inborn feeling that "the world revolves around me." There are several components to this issue.
- *Seeing the Other As a Person, Not My Object* - The first component is the ability to see your spouse as a separate person, distance from you, with her own needs and feelings. In other words, she doesn't exist just to meet your needs. Whenever we view others only in terms of how they affect us, we are in big trouble. This is self-centeredness. We reduce others to objects of our own needs, and we don't see them as real people. And whenever we don't see people for who they really are, love breaks down.
- *Allowing the Other's Experience* - The second way in which we allow others to exist in their own right is to allow their experience. We need to put our own experience aside and join in the other's experience. We need to understand the other's experience, identify with it, and have compassion for the other in it. The ability to do this is called *empathy*. Empathy is the bedrock of intimacy. To have good boundaries is to be separate enough

from the other person that you can allow her to have her own experience without reacting with your own. Such a clear stance of separateness allows you not to react, but to care and empathize. Not allowing the other's experience can be a major cause of fighting and of feeling misunderstood.

- *Allowing the Freedom to Be Different* – The third way in which we allow others to exist in their own right is allowing them the freedom to be different from us. In a good marriage, spouses value each other's differences and treat them with respect. They understand each other, listen, reason, compromise, and give up their own wishes sometimes. Because "twoness" exists, oneness can develop. In a marriage in which the individuals aren't allowed to be different, things don't go as well. Husbands and wives judge each other as "bad" for the preferences each one has. Or they take the difference as a personal affront or a lack of love. Differences are not bad. They are part of the stuff of which love grows. The differences are what you like about a person at the beginning of a relationship and then fight about for the rest of our lives. Why is that? Differences are exciting and bring a sense of getting to enjoy something we don't possess. But differences threaten us if we have not matured enough to be truly separate people from each other. To immature people, differences imply distance, a lack of love, abandonment, rejection, or, in some cases, a challenge for *us* to grow. And under this threat, love gets put on the back burner for self-protection.
- *Cherishing the Other's Existence*- Another part of the "you are not me" concept is the ability to see another person for who she is apart from what we want or need from her and to love and appreciate that person for who she is. To cherish someone's existence apart from you and apart from what you get from that person is a neat aspect of love. It requires very good boundaries, the ability to see the other person as distinct and separate from you—a person in her own right, with value and wonderful things about her that have nothing to do with gratifying you in any way other than pure appreciation. This is the joy of just knowing a person. This neat aspect of love is one of the ones that gives the most pleasure as couples grow together.

Adults Respect Each Other's Freedom

- Freedom is a prerequisite of love. If someone controls us, love is not possible. Control results in slavery, not love. The ability for each partner to allow the other to be a free, separate person is one of the hallmarks of a solid relationship.

Free to Have Space

- This balance of being deeply connected as well as free to be individuals is one of the most important aspects of completeness. It allows the development and growth of the individual partners as well as the marriage.
- The problem marriage is one in which one partner sees time apart, separateness, and space as a threat. This spouse may feel that separateness means a lack of love, or abandonment. She can only feel loved when with the other person.
- Freedom is the scariest of all human privileges. Adam and Eve used their freedom destructively to sin against God. In the same way, we can use freedom against each other. The call to relationship with God and each other is a call to freedom. But that freedom is not to be used to gratify self-centeredness.
- Some spouses use their freedom to indulge their own desires at the expense of the marriage.
- So the Bible's warning offers the best solution for that danger: "Love your neighbor as yourself." In other words, in your exercise of separateness, make sure that you are seeing

how your freedom and separateness are affecting your spouse. Would you want to be treated with disregard? Certainly not.

- But remember, it goes both ways. You are free to be separate, but you are also free to be controlling! No one can stop you except yourself. So, if you are trying to control your spouse's separateness and freedom with guilt and prohibition, then ask yourself the same question: Would you like to be imprisoned? Again, the answer is certainly not.

Good Fear of Reality

- If you are controlling your spouse's freedom and separateness, you are no longer an object of love. You have become two things that your spouse will rebel against because it is part of God's plan. You have become the master of a slave, and you have become a parent. A spouse was never intended to be either.
- Rebelling against control is the motivation behind many affairs and other problems. The spouse who feels controlled is not mature enough to stand up with responsible boundaries, and he acts out in an affair to "gain a sense of freedom."
- Persuasive words are often words of flattery and freedom, words that give 'relief' to the nagging and guilty feeling of control that a husband or wife is getting at home. Do not become this nagging parent. Give freedom, and require responsible use of that freedom in the service of love.

Longing

- God designed human beings with a longing for relationship, with a longing to come together and not go through life alone. We all have this longing. While single people satisfy this longing with friends and relatives, married people go one step further; they meet part of this longing by finding a life partner. God designed marriage particularly to satisfy this longing for relationship, to give companionship on life's journey.
- This drive for companionship must be kept at the forefront of our discussion of freedom. If one of you is controlling, if you restrict your partner's freedom, companionship is destroyed. But beyond that, freedom nourishes separateness, which is in and of itself *an undesirable state*. Therefore, freedom from each other ironically creates the very longing that will bring you together over and over again. You must build freedom into your marriage so that you have enough separateness to desire to come together to solve the problem that separateness creates!
- This paradox is one of the balancing truths in God's universe. Separateness and togetherness go hand in hand. If you have too much separateness, you have no relationship because you become too disconnected. But if you have no separateness, you also have no relationship because there are no longer two people involved.
- Therefore, see the need for freedom as part of God's design, and find the right balance between togetherness and freedom for the two of you. Make sure you have both.

Chapter 5- What You Value is What You'll Have

- I (Dr. Cloud) don't remember where I first heard this saying, but I have come to believe it: "You get what you tolerate." In other words, in an imperfect world, imperfection will always seek you out, and if you tolerate it, you will certainly find all of it that you can handle. Unpleasant things seek the level they are allowed to exist in your life, especially in a marriage.

- While you might get all the bad stuff you tolerate, what about the good things in a marriage? Where do they come from? They generally come from the same place from which “tolerance” comes: *your values*. On both the positive and the negative side, ultimately what you value is what you will have. If you value something in a relationship, you will not tolerate anything that destroys this value, and you will also seek to make sure it is present and growing. And because of these values, the relationship takes on an identity and form, a character of its own. Certain things happen in the relationship, and other things don’t. What you value happens and what you don’t value is absent. In marriage, for example, it works like this:
 1. We will not tolerate anything that violates our value of honesty.
 2. We both will actively seek to build and increase the presence of honesty in our marriage.
- Your values are the ultimate boundaries of your marriage. They form it, protect it, and give it a place to grow. They dictate what the nature of the relationship is going to be, what is not going to be allowed to grow there, as well as what is going to be sought after and maintained. The values of your relationship become like the frame of a house; they give it shape. What you value determines the kind of relationship you most likely will have in the end.

The Worst Value Ever

- *People who always want to be happy and pursue it above all else are some of the most miserable people in the world.* The reason is that happiness is a *result*. It is sometimes the result of having good things happen. But usually it is the result of our being in a good place inside ourselves and our having done the character work we need to do so that we are content and joyful in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. Happiness is a fruit of a lot of hard work in relationship, career, spiritual growth, or a host of other arenas of life. But nowhere is this as true as in marriage.
- Marriage is a lot of work, period. I don’t know anyone who has been married very long who does not attest to that. When couples do the right kind of work-character work-they find that they can gain more happiness in their marriage than they thought possible. But it always comes as a result of going through some difficult moments. Conflicts, fears, and old traumas. Big and small rejections, arguments, and hurt feelings. The disillusionment of someone being different than was imagined. The difficult task of accepting imperfections and immaturity that are larger than one thinks they should be.
- All of these things are normal, and all of these things are workable. And if people work through them, they reach happiness again, usually a happiness of a deeper and better sort. But if they hit these inevitable walls and have the attitude that this problem is “interfering with my happiness,” they are in real trouble. They will be angry with the “inconvenience” of their happiness being interrupted and will refuse to solve the issues or will just leave the relationship. If happiness is our guide and it goes away momentarily, we will assume that something is wrong.
- The truth is (and this is why happiness is such a horrible value) that when we are not happy, something good may be happening. You may have been brought to that moment of crisis because of a need for growth, and that crisis may be the solution to much of what is wrong with your life. If you could grasp whatever it is that this situation is asking you to learn, it could change your entire life. This is why James tells us to “consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he

should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:2-5)

- If not happiness, then what should you value? What should you magnify and lift up to guide you? Certainly we cannot decide all of your values for you. But there are a few values the Bible holds in very high esteem, and these values work to produce great boundaries in marriage.
 1. Love of God
 2. Love of Your Spouse
 3. Honesty
 4. Faithfulness
 5. Compassion and Forgiveness
 6. Holiness

The Big Picture

- In marriage, if you focus on what you want and desire and just stay angry and disappointed that you are not getting it, you will remain there. But if you focus on cultivating the garden instead of demanding the fruit, then your garden will yield a huge harvest.
- So it is with values. Make cultivating the ones we mention here of prime concern. Work on them. *Stand against anything in yourself or your spouse that would destroy them.* This is righteous indignation, and your marriage may depend on it. But also, do everything you can to increase the presence of these things. Give time, money, energy, focus, and other resources to developing the love of God and each other, honesty, faithfulness, compassion, forgiveness, and holiness. Pursue them with everything the two of you can muster. They will not fail you in the end.

Chapter 6- Value One-Love of God

- Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with every ounce of yourself: “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). Why did he place this value above all others?
- Although we could point to many reasons, one in particular relates to marriage. When loving God is our orienting principle in life, *we are always adjusting to what he requires from us.* When things get tough in a marriage and when some change is required from us, we might not want to do it. We might feel that it is unfair that we have to change, or it might be too difficult or painful to change. At those moments, it is much easier to just please ourselves. But if we know that it’s God with whom we ultimately have to deal, we submit to this reality and his higher calling to us to grow. In the end, the relationship wins.
- This is why loving God must be first. He empowers us to change. He tells us *how* to change. And, most of all, God becomes the one that keeps us from being ultimately in charge. If we try to be in charge, we will do it our way, and then our own limitations become the limitations of the relationship as well. We all need someone bigger to answer to so we will make the changes we need to make.
- Love God first, with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Lose your life to him, and you will gain it.

Chapter 7- Value Two- Love of Your Spouse

- The love that builds a marriage is the kind of love God has for us. It is called “agape.” Agape is love that seeks the welfare of the other. It is love that has nothing to do with how someone is gratifying us at the moment. It has to do with what is good for *the other*. In short, agape is concerned with the good of the other person.
- Jesus said it this way in the second greatest commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” When we do that, we are truly loving someone.
- What does it mean to love someone “as yourself” in marriage? It means three things: you so deeply identify with your spouse that you feel the effects of your own behavior on your spouse, you think first of making your spouse’s life better, and you want the best for your spouse even when your spouse can’t see what that is.
- To deeply identify with another person is to think about the effects of your behavior on that other person. It is to get out of the self-centeredness of just acting to please oneself. To love someone “as yourself” is to put yourself in the other person’s shoes and see what it feels like to be her. This empowers you to seek the best for the other person because it puts you in touch with her life and how it feels to be her, especially on the other end of relationship with you.
- Second, loving your spouse as yourself means you think of making your spouse’s life better. You think first about what it would be like to be in the situation or state of life she is in. Then what would you like if you were in this situation?
- Third, and this is the most difficult to grasp-loving your spouse as yourself means you want the best for your spouse even when your spouse can’t see what that is. It may be a difficult confrontation, or a healing in your spouse’s life. A good example of this is when a person does an intervention on an addicted spouse and puts him into treatment, even if the spouse does not realize that this is good for him. Or, it may mean a need for spiritual growth and a person tries to get her spouse closer to God. Or, it may mean a relief from duties, as when one spouse gets a job to lighten the workload of the other. The key concept is that this is done for the benefit of the other, not for oneself. An intervention is *for the addict*, even if the entire family benefits.

Commitment

- In addition to being based in empathy, this love is based in commitment. Again, this is best seen in the kind of love God has for us. God’s word for this kind of commitment is *covenant*. By making a covenant with us, God promised that he is committed to us, and he does not break his promises.
- If someone is not committed to a marriage, when the marriage gets difficult, he is tempted to leave the marriage instead of working through the difficulty. If leaving is an option, why go through the pain? Why go through the work? A problem in a relationship is usually a sign that both parties need to grow and change, and without commitment, avoidance is often the easier way out. Some do not leave physically, but they leave emotionally. They forsake the relationship by taking their heart out of it.
- Commitment also provides something else necessary for growth: security. Without the security that commitment provides, partners know at some deep level that if they do not perform up to some expectation, they could be “forsaken.”
- As a friend said to me, “It is a totally different life when you know that the one who loves you is never going to go away. It changes you at a very deep level.”

Action

- Love is not just a feeling or an attachment to a person. Love is an expression of that attachment. The love that brings good boundaries to a marriage is the love that brings action to the relationship as well.
- Usually, in the beginning stages of courtship, the couple is working hard to express and show their love to one another. But as the relationship proceeds, and the knot has been tied, one or both begin to “work less” at showing, expressing, and giving love. They settle into a mutual “taking the other for granted.”
- True love will not allow itself to go cold. When it does, there is a call to action, a call to rekindling the flame.

A Picture

- Love is the foundation for marriage: love for God and love for another person. It expresses itself in seeking the best for the other person no matter whether they deserve it or not. It places the other person above one’s own selfish needs and desires. It sacrifices, gives, and suffers. It weathers hurts and storms for the long-term preservation of the covenant. It preserves itself as if it is fighting for life.
- Make love your highest value in your marriage, and it is likely to return the commitment you make to it. It will pay you back multifold, much more than you ever thought possible. For in the end, love is the strongest power at our disposal:
- Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).
- None of us is able to live out this description of love completely, but as we try, love will serve as a powerful boundary against all sorts of evil. It will protect your relationship and give you many, many returns for all that you invest in its enduring power.

Chapter 8- Value Three-Honesty

- Deception damages a relationship. The act of lying is much more damaging than the things that are being lied about, because lying undermines the knowing of one another and the connection itself.
- Deception is the one thing that cannot be worked through because it denies the problem. It is the one unforgivable sin of a relationship because it makes forgiveness unattainable.
- Intimacy comes from “knowing” the other person at a deep level. If there are barriers to honesty, knowing is ruled out and the false takes over. As Paul tells us in the Bible, “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body” (Ephesians 4:25). Couples often live out years of falsehood trying to protect and save a relationship, all the while destroying any chance of real relationship.
- If you and your spouse can feel safe enough in your marriage to be totally vulnerable, if you can remove each other’s fig leaves, then once again your marriage can return to a state of paradise. True intimacy is the closest thing to heaven we can know.

For a Reason

- Most of the time, in otherwise good marriages, deception takes place for “defensive” reasons. In other words, the dishonest spouse is often lying not for evil reasons, but to protect himself. Fears drive the deception. This does not excuse the lying, but it does complicate matters. For spouses to tell the whole truth, they must deal with their fears first.

- Here are common fears:
 - Fear of real closeness and being known
 - Fears of abandonment and loss of love if they are known
 - Fears of being controlled and possessed if they are known
 - Fears of being seen as “bad” or not good enough if some part of them is known
 - Fears of their own desires, needs, and feelings
- What you can do in your marriage is make a total commitment between the two of you to:
 1. Have enough grace to tell the truth. Promise that you will never punish your spouse for being honest. This doesn’t mean that there will be no consequences, but punishment, shame, and condemnation should not be part of those consequences.
 2. Give each other free rein to question and check out things with each other. Don’t be offended by the other spouse’s need to understand some facts that do not add up. Don’t retort defensively, “What? Don’t you trust me?”
 3. Police each other when you see your spouse not being totally honest. This can even be harmless and fun, but hold each other to the truth.
 4. Become a partner in your spouse’s life to heal the underlying fears of being honest. If your spouse’s issue is abandonment, for example, show him that you are not going to treat him like whoever abandoned him before.
 5. Take responsibility for your own dishonesty and its underlying fears, and make a commitment to resolving them. Become a person of the truth, and find someone else besides your spouse to hold you accountable. Get a friend to help you tell the truth when you are afraid.
 6. Use discernment. While total honesty is the ideal, every relationship is not ready for total knowing and being known. Some truths are not ready to be dealt with yet. Some people are too fragile or are in special circumstances, and they need help to deal with some things, or the timing needs to be right. Use wisdom to know what your relationship can handle and what it is not ready for. Check out other resources, such as counseling, healing, time, or other people, that may be needed for honesty to work.
- If you are to build a strong relationship, make a commitment to each other of total honesty. But remember, honesty must be accompanied by enough grace to hear and deal with the truth it brings. God always asks us to be honest with him in light of his grace for us, so you have to be able to deal with and accept the truth expressed to you as well.

Chapter 9- Value Four- Faithfulness

- *A faithful spouse is one who can be trusted, depended upon, and believed in, and one in whom you can rest.*

What Drives People Apart

- Faithfulness means to be trusted in all areas, not just the sexual, trusted in matters of the heart as well as those of the body. Being faithful to your spouse means that you can be depended upon to do what you have promised, to follow through on what your spouse has entrusted to you. It means that your spouse can be certain that you will deliver on what you have promised. It could mean being sexually faithful, but it could also mean doing chores faithfully! It could mean staying within the monthly budget and coming home when you say you will. It could mean sharing without fear of reprisal or condemnation.

- Faithfulness, of course, also means that you will not stray from the one you love. Physical adultery means giving yourself to someone else sexually. But you can commit emotional adultery as well; you can have an “affair of the heart.” An affair of the heart means taking aspects of yourself and intentionally keeping them away from the marriage.
- “Objects” of unfaithfulness are numerous. Some are people, some are not. But the bottom line is that they come between you and your spouse. Some part of you avoids the relationship.

No Excuses

- An act of unfaithfulness is something that one person does, not two. As the Bible says of God, “If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). God does not become unfaithful if we do not love him correctly. He remains faithful no matter what we do. Marriage requires this as well. Do not let your spouse’s failures of love be an excuse for your unfaithfulness.
- If you struggle with wanting to take some part of yourself to someone or something other than your spouse, find out why. Your actions may be okay; your spouse can’t identify with all parts of you. Different interests and different aspects of personal identity keep spouses from totally identifying with each other. One person cannot be all that you need in life. Friends can connect with some parts of you better than your spouse. This is okay.

Chapter 10- Value Five-Compassion and Forgiveness

- The person you love the most and have committed your life to is an imperfect being. This person is guaranteed to hurt you and fail you in many ways, some serious and some not. You can expect the failures to come. As the Bible says, “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins” (Ecclesiastes 7:20).
- Nothing in a relationship has to permanently destroy that relationship if forgiveness is in the picture. No failure is larger than grace. No hurt exists that love cannot heal. But, for all of these miracles to take place, there must be compassion and tenderheartedness.
- First, you forgive what is inferior to the ideal standard. You humble yourself to identify with your loved one, who is experiencing life in a way that is less than you or even he would want. You give up all demands for your spouse to be something he isn’t at that moment.
- Second, if your spouse is hurting or failing, you are not morally superior, but you are in the stronger position at that moment to be able to help. God never uses the stronger position to hurt, but always to help. As Paul puts it, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:12-14).
- What a picture that is! “Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” What if you “wore” these qualities every time your spouse failed or was hurting? I think we would see a lot more healed marriages.
- But that is not the human way. The human way is to harden our hearts when we are hurt or offended.
- Hardness of heart, much more than failure, is the true relationship killer. As Jesus said, failure is not the cause of divorce, but hardness of heart is (see Matthew 19:8). This is why the Bible places such a high value on tenderheartedness.

- Tenderheartedness consists of a number of things.
 1. *An Identification with Sin and Failure*- Make sure that you have an attitude of humility toward your spouse's failures. If you think you are above sin, you are in big trouble. If you are very familiar with your own sins, you will have a lot more grace for your spouse's.
 2. *An Identification with Weakness*- Invulnerability is one of the chief causes of hard hearts. If you are staying away from your own hurts and vulnerabilities, you will not be able to identify with the hurts of your spouse either. The Bible tells us that we comfort others out of the empathy we have received for our own struggles (2 Corinthians 1:4). Deal with your own pains and hurts, and you will have more empathy for your spouse. Don't get angry with your spouse for her weakness! This is the worst thing you can ever do. It is using your strength in that area to destroy. Identify with your spouse's weakness or inability as if it were your own. Become a partner in the healing process, not a judge or an impediment.
 3. *A Willingness to Become Vulnerable Again*- Sometimes people build up protectiveness from childhood that says, in effect, "I will never let anyone hurt me again." Then they take that strategy into marriage. Whereas it might have been useful earlier in life, this strategy keeps them from having closeness now. When you get hurt, if your spouse is truly repentant and can be trusted, open up again. Be vulnerable again. This is what God does with us.
 4. *A Willingness to Repent*- Forgiveness and tenderheartedness come from the injured party. But, for it to be useful to the future of the relationship, the person who failed must own his failure and show a true change of heart.

Chapter 11- Value Six- Holiness

- A holy person is someone who is "blameless." The Bible pictures holiness as not just being religious, but also being reality oriented. To be holy means to be pure and blameless.
- If every marriage placed value on holiness, the following would be present:
 1. Confession and ownership of the problems in each individual
 2. A relentless drive toward growth and development
 3. A giving up of everything that gets in the way of love
 4. A surrendering of everything that gets in the way of truth
 5. A purity of heart where nothing toxic is allowed to grow
- The primary reason for growth must be that one is "hungering for righteousness"-not for someone else, but for oneself. Ultimately, this is the only way that anyone is going to have life, when he hungers for it and pursues it with everything he has.
- Don't get holiness confused with some religious picture. Pursuing holiness means that you and your spouse pursue becoming the kind of people who can produce true love and life. You become whole. You become trustworthy, honest, faithful, and loving. In marriage, holiness is anything but boring. It is the kind of purity and trustworthiness from which the deepest kinds of passion flow.

Chapter 12- Three's a Crowd- Protecting Your Marriage from Intruders

The Outside Affects the Inside

- The marriage union itself needs to be actively protected. God designed both spouses to invest continually in their attachment to each other. Couples need to work to keep their love secure and safe.
- Many things compete for your love, as we will see in this section. You cannot assume that the strong connection you had when you first married will always “just be there.” Other forces can come between you and your mate and diminish your relationship.
- The outside world deeply affects how a marriage operates. The pressures, temptations, and even genuinely good opportunities coming from the outside world are limitless. As stewards of the marriage covenant, you need to know how to structure your relationship so that the outside doesn't control what is inside.
- A marriage is only as strong as what it costs to protect it. In other words, you value what you invest in. If you have spent time, effort, and sacrifice in preserving your marriage from other influences, your odds of a solid marriage are better. If life has just “happened” to your marriage, you will have a more fragile bond. Like the man who sold all he had for the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46), those who value the preciousness of their marriage will pay a high price to preserve it.

Triangulation

- Our love often gets segmented into other places. This problem, called triangulation, is one of the great enemies of good marriages. Triangulation occurs when one spouse brings in a third party for an unhealthy reason. A “triangle” is created when, for example, a wife (Person A) goes to a friend (Person C) for something that she should go to her husband (Person B) for. Or in a family setting, a sibling (Person A) calls you (Person C) to talk about “Mom's problem,” without first talking to Mom (Person B).
- Here are some examples of triangulation that occur in marriage:
 1. A wife talks to her best friend about her unhappiness with her husband, but doesn't let him know her feelings.
 2. A husband confides to his secretary that his wife doesn't understand him.
 3. One spouse makes their child a confidant, becoming closer to the child than to her mate.
 4. A husband is more invested in his parents than in his wife.
- In all these examples, a spouse is taking a part of his heart away from his mate and bringing it to an outside source. This is not only painful, but also unjust. It works against what God intended to develop in marriage-the mysterious unity that brings the couple closer to each other in ever-deepening ways. Triangulation betrays trust and fractures the union.
- Married love requires a great deal of safety for intimacy to grow. Marriage brings out the most vulnerable, fragile parts of us. And these vulnerable parts need a warm, grace-filled, and secure environment in which to grow. If a third party threatens this, those fragile parts cannot be safe enough to emerge, connect, and develop.

Forsaking is Protecting

- Reality dictates that in order to say yes to keeping a close marriage, you will have to say no to lots of other things. A life of “yes” to everything else ultimately results in a “no” to your marriage. You simply do not have the time, resources, or energy to do everything you want to do.
- Marriage involves much more than two loving people keeping love alive. It means doing some hard work in forsaking, or leaving behind, other things.

A Word of Caution

- All good marriages need outside support, so we need to seek out the right and appropriate sources. These should be people who are not only safe, but whose influence on us strengthens the marriage bond.

The Intruder as a Symptom of Marriage Struggles

- Often the intruder isn't the issue. The intruder is the result, or symptom, of another issue in marriage. The real issue has more to do with your relationship or your character. Sometimes something is broken in the connection.
- When a marriage contains conflict or hurt, we tend to busy ourselves in other people and activities. Busyness is less painful than facing some seemingly unsolvable problem in love day after day.

Intimacy Can Promote Intruders in Marriage

- The nature of emotional intimacy itself can make a marriage vulnerable to outside influences. When we are intimate, we experience someone's negative characteristics along with the positive ones.
- Intimacy, then, causes two threats that leave the marriage open to intruders. The first threat is within ourselves. When we notice our vulnerability and exposure, we become frightened.
- Many people distance themselves emotionally when they have these fears. They may shut down and withdraw, for example, or they may feel blamed and condemned. This distance can cause a breach in the trust relationship. When this breach is allowed to continue, intruders have an opportunity to get in between the love of the couple.
- The second threat is not internal, but resides in the marriage relationship itself. When intimacy does its work-and, for example, the wife's frailties are exposed to the husband-the husband can actually distance. What should happen is that increased openness elicits increased grace, compassion, and forgiveness as the husband's love has grown along with the relationship. However, for many reasons, a husband may not be able to handle that part of his wife. Here are some areas that may bring about distance:
 - Hurts: your mate wants you to be a stronger person
 - Failings: your spouse is disappointed in your imperfections
 - Sins: your mate is unable to tolerate living with a sinner
 - Negative feelings: your spouse desires only positive emotions
 - Aspects of himself: your mate is reminded of his own faults through you
- Then, as the husband reacts to his wife's problems, he pulls away emotionally. And again work, kids, or other people step in.

Filling the Vacuum

- When couples find themselves with this intimacy problem, it is best for them to take responsibility for the issue and begin to reconnect.
- Some spouses distance because they have poor boundaries. Withdrawal becomes the only boundary they have. They can't be in relationship with the failings of their mate. When they need to be connected and yet set limits with some problem, they find that they can't stay connected. Or if they connect, they can't address the problem. These spouses need to work on becoming both loving and truthful at the same time.

Not Knowing Your Limits

- Often couples have problems with intruders because one or both of the mates simply are not aware of their own time, energy, and investment resources. They actually think they'll take care of the fires at home at some point. They sincerely intend to talk, date, and stay involved with their spouse, but not at this moment. And, too often, the moments don't come, or at least not often enough. The intruders win, and the couple loses.
- This problem usually has to do with the "limitless" spouse's inability to see how his actions have consequences. Someone else is always there picking up the pieces, starting perhaps with a parent, then friends, then co-workers, or a spouse. The lack of anxiety about marriage problems comes from a lack of anxiety about *anything*.

Taking the Marriage for Granted

- Marriages can go a long time before the influence of intruders is felt. If both spouses are active, structured people, they may shift away without a discernible blip, moving from a deep connection between each other into a comfortably numb one. They may wake up one day feeling that they aren't inside each other's hearts and that other things own their hearts. The saddest cases are those in which the partners become aware of this and think, *It's not that bad as is, let's just keep things this way.*
- The reality is that marriage is only as good as the investment people make in it. God has constructed life so that we are always either going forward into the growth process or backing away from it. We can't stay the same. And marriage reflects this reality. The connection either deepens, opening both spouses up to the hearts of each, or it starts to deteriorate, closing them off from each other.
- Do not mistake a lack of crisis as a sign that the marriage is healthy. Couples need to regularly check in with each other and ask the hard questions, such as "How do you feel about us?" and "What am I doing that hurts or bothers you?"

Problems in Setting Boundaries with Others

- The boundary-less mate may be less afraid to let his spouse down than the boss or others. It is often because he feels safer with her and knows she won't leave him. But this is a fatal error in perceiving safety. We should be able to trust a safe spouse and relax in her love. However, safety was never meant as a rationalization for neglecting the love obligation. Living in unconditional grace is never an excuse to be irresponsible or hurtful. As the Bible teaches, "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" (Romans 6:15). To take for granted that a spouse will "always be there for us" is, at some level, to place burdens upon that spouse's ability to love and trust us back.
- If fear and guilt are the reason your marriage has become infested with intruders, you need to do two things. On the one hand, refrain from nagging and threatening your codependent spouse. If you don't refrain, you risk becoming, in his mind, part of those many people he secretly resents and hates for being so demanding on him.

- On the other hand, stay away from the tendency to ignore the problem and hope it goes away. The best solution is always to love and yet not rescue a spouse's behavior.
- You need to maintain a position of love without rescue and of truth without nagging. Your own caring boundaries then provide hope for your spouse to develop his own sense of self and boundaries.

Inability to Love with Differences

- Being different should not be a problem in marriage. In fact, it should be a benefit. Your world has been enlarged. You are no longer bound to a world of your own making, which is a prison God never intended for us. You are forced to listen to, interact with, and consider the feelings and opinions of another human being in some matter in which you are dead sure you are right. If this is not a solution for human arrogance, what is!
- Differences do not create intruder problems. Immaturity does. As spouses own their own weaknesses and issues, what used to drive them crazy often becomes a source of joy for them.

Conflict Avoidance

- Because you are not two clones, your differences guarantee conflict in marriage. Two people who feel strongly about how life should be lived will try to resolve the differences. However, some people fear conflict more than others.

The Intruders Themselves

- We want to deal with some of the intruders that weaken the marriage bond and remember that intruders are a fruit, not a root, of the real problem. Deal with the cause, and the intruder will cease to pull you apart.
 - **Work-** Here are some issues that may be involved:
 - **Attachment problems.** A husband's inability to relate emotionally may cause him to flee to work, where he feels more competent. A wife may need to work on helping her husband own the problem and helping him connect on feeling levels.
 - **Demands for praise.** A husband may be self-absorbed and desire the affirmation of work over the confrontations of his spouse. A wife may need to help him experience love over admiration and help him give up the demand to be praised at all times.
 - **Lack of safety.** A wife may experience hurt in her marriage and withdraw to work for more positive relationships. This couple may need help in making the marriage safe enough to withstand conflict.
 - **Lack of freedom.** A husband may be controlling, and the only way a wife can get some freedom is to go away from him. He may need to work on respecting her boundaries, and she may need to work on being more direct about her needs.
- In all of these scenarios, the answer is not to quit work, but to deal with the character and relational problems.

○ **Friends**

- **Superficiality.** A mate is more “broad” than “deep.” That is, he relates well on superficial levels, but fears the closeness that comes with intimacy. He may need help in his fear of being abandoned or hurt.
- **Hurt in the marriage.** A spouse may have experienced rejection from her spouse in her deeper parts. For example, her husband may criticize her weaknesses, frailties, anger, or needs. So friends become the place for these parts. The husband may need to work on accepting all of her, yet allowing her the freedom of investing in friends also for her own growth.
- **Rejection of the spouse.** A self-centered spouse may discover that her mate is not perfect and so gives up on him, investing in others. Here the couple must deal with grieving perfectionistic demands and work on making her life “good enough,” even if not ideal.
- **Sharing secrets with friends.** Sometimes a spouse will be hurt because his mate has secret phone times and conversations. In the ideal, spouses should have no serious secrets in a marriage. The deeper the relationship, the greater its ability to withstand the realities of each spouse. But some more frail marriages may have to use healthy settings such as a pastoral counselor or a therapist until the marriage is strong enough to deal with what exists between them.

○ **Kids**

- **Hiding intimacy conflicts behind children.** The couple has issues with closeness or control, yet neither partner wants to deal with them. You can never give enough time to kids (just ask them!). So the relationship becomes child-centered rather than marriage-centered. These couples need to bring out their conflicts with each other safely and work through them.
- **Overidentifying with children.** Some spouses feel inordinate guilt and responsibility for their children’s lives, and they have a hard time letting go. They feel the spouse can handle the neglect, and they overinvolve themselves in parenting. They need to allow age-appropriate space and time with their kids, an action that allows the children to separate and the couple to become closer.
- **Having better boundaries with kids than with the spouse.** Often a mate will feel, “If she won’t listen to my opinion, at least the children will.” And he will overinvest in his children because they will heed his words. This couple needs to work on respecting each other’s boundaries and helping the other feel both love and freedom.
- **Misperceptions about parenting and marriage.** Some people have simply never thought through the fact that parenting is temporary and marriage is permanent. A friend told me once, “We’re in a ‘childocentric’ culture, and I want to become more ‘familycentric.’” Couples may need to adjust their values appropriately.

- *Affairs* – The most hurtful intruder-an affair- is a tragic symptom of other problems, such as the following:
 - *Emptiness in the marriage.* Some spouses have affairs to connect with someone when they can't connect with their spouse.
 - *Demands to be treated as perfect.* Sometimes a spouse with narcissistic tendencies will reject his mate's mirroring of his imperfections and find someone who will stroke and admire him.
 - *Victim-perpetrator-rescuer issues.* One spouse will take on the helpless victim role, and the other will be the predatory perpetrator. Then the victim will seek out a rescuer-type to protect her from the evil one-that is, until the rescuer begins to show signs of being flawed, also.
 - *Boundary problems.* One spouse will be unable to set limits in the marriage. The affair becomes the only way he has ever said no to his spouse. In other words, it is the only noncompliant thing he has ever done in the marriage.

Chapter 13- Six Kinds of Conflict

- **Conflict #1: Sin of One Spouse**
- The first thing to consider in facing the conflict that comes from an individual's sin is the attitude of the spouse confronting the sin. Even the best of people can do what the Bible calls "falling short of the glory of God." The best thing that anyone can do in the face of the sin of a spouse is to demonstrate the same attitude God has toward someone who sins: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32)
- Do not minimize the sin of your spouse, and ask him or her not to minimize yours. Ultimately this will be best for both of you and for the relationship. Go tough on the issue, but remember, as God is with you, go soft on the person. Like Jesus, face sin with both grace and truth.
- The process looks like this:
 1. Look at your own attitude. Rid yourself of judgmentalism, condemnation, shame, or pride. Look at the log in your own eye, show mercy, and identify with your spouse as a fellow sinner.
 2. Speak to the issue directly. Let your spouse know that you know, and tell him that what he is doing is not right. If the sin is against you, let him know how you feel. Talk about the hurt and how it affects you and whoever else is involved. Don't shame him, but be honest. Use "I" statements.
 3. A boundary-loving spouse will acknowledge the wrong and apologize. Accept it; offer forgiveness. Reaffirm your love and acceptance.
 4. When emotions are not strong, talk about the problem to see if there is any further help he might need. Even though he might have confessed and repented, underlying issues may need to be addressed, and he might need outside help. Offer your support and help to solve the problem.
 5. Agree on a follow-up plan. "If I notice something again, how do you want me to help you? What do you want me to do?" This way you become a team member to deal with the problem and not a police officer. You might want to talk to him about bringing other resources to the problem as well, such as friends to hold him accountable. The important issue is that you are together as a team to fight the reoccurrence.

- **Conflict #2: Immaturity or Brokenness of One Person**
- All of us will fall short of the demands of life. This is a difficult concept for some people to understand. Most people get married totally unaware of their spouse's shortcomings. In fact, part of "falling in love" is idealizing an imperfect person, not even seeing where he or she falls short of that ideal. In every relationship, reality eventually surfaces. When it does, it is very important to face it in the following helpful ways.
 1. **Accept Reality**- Both of you will be unprepared for some of the realities life brings. You will not have the emotional ability to weather some stresses in the way you would like. Or you will not have the skill needed to be a mature adult. Below are some common areas where normal people find they have brokenness from the past or some immaturity where they are not equipped to perform as they or their spouse would like:
 - Relational abilities to get close, communicate, or sustain intimacy
 - Parenting abilities
 - Emotional problems from the past or from their family of origin
 - Lack of structure, self-discipline, or follow-through
 - Financial inability to make or manage money
 - Sexual difficulties from fear, past trauma, shame, or other emotional factors
 - Not having completed the "twoness" and identity formation
 - Not having completely left home and become an adult, ready for marriage
- None of these are "sins." They are areas in which you are immature and need to grow.
 2. **Communicate Your Support to Your Spouse**- We do not grow when we are judged, nagged, condemned, resented, or subjected to some other lack of grace. We all need to feel that someone is on our side and supporting us. Let your partner know that you are her biggest supporter and reaffirm your absolute unconditional love and acceptance for her just like she is. As 1 Thessalonians 5:14 tells us, "Encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone." Let your spouse know that her weakness or inability is something with which you will be supportive and patient.
 3. **Face Issues as Real Problems**- Although we don't wish to be nonsupportive or lack grace, we also wish to be honest about problems. Part of love, remember, is honesty and requiring holiness and growth from each other. So, where your spouse is not mature, let her know. Be direct. Tell her what you see as a problem. Let your spouse know how you feel and how it affects you. But be careful to stay away from shame and condemnation.
 4. **Own Your Problems**- If you are the one confronted with your immaturity, own it. Be a "boundary lover." Be the kind of wise man or woman who loves to get feedback and heeds it. Don't be defensive, and try to learn what the person who sees you every day is learning about you.
 5. **Get a Plan**- We need help, mentoring, support, and teaching. No one ever grew up on his own. Some need therapy. Others need financial counseling. Still others need support groups or recovery groups. Some need accountability systems. But make sure that your immaturity or brokenness does not rule you. Overcome it by being intentional about dealing with it. Devote resources, time, and energy to the problem.

6. Make it Mutual- Guard against labeling one spouse “the problem person.” This is never true. Neither of you is a complete person yet; you are both still growing up. Usually one of you has to grow more in the *relational* area, such as expressing feelings and confronting problems, and the other in the *functional* area of life, such as advancing in a career and getting things done. Help each other in your areas of weakness. Remember: you are one now. And if one of you is suffering, so is the other. You are no longer individuals in the way singles are. Make the equality mutual, and make the problems mutual so that you help each other.
- **Conflict #3: Hurt Feelings That Are No One’s Fault**
 - Because we all have hurts and things to which we are sensitive, innocent things will set us off. What is important is that we learn how to deal with this kind of hurt where no one is really “wrong.” Here are some hints:
 1. When You Are Hurt, Acknowledge It to Yourself- Know yourself well enough to know when something is bothering you, and own your feelings. Figure out what is bothering you.
 2. Communicate- Tell your spouse you are hurt by something she did. Don’t blame your spouse as if she has sinned. Communicate that you know it is your problem, that you just want your spouse to understand. Use “I” statements and talk about your own feelings, making sure that you don’t sound as if you are blaming your spouse.
 3. Empathize- Be a healing agent for the hurt of the past. When you offer understanding instead of devaluing your spouse’s feelings, you are doing the opposite of the one who caused the original hurt and are becoming part of the healing instead of part of the problem.
 4. Identify Patterns and Plan- Learn what hurts you. Then you can anticipate things that might hurt you in the future. And when it happens, you can take precautions to respond helpfully or, better yet, avoid the hurt altogether. If you see situations coming up, you can plan for them so that hurt does not happen.
 5. Be in a Healing Mode- We are all responsible for the hurts we carry around inside. If you have become aware of a repetitive theme of hurt, call it a problem and obtain some help. Do something to pursue healing in that area so that it stops interfering in your life. That is part of becoming a complete, healed person.
 6. Guard Against “Going to Court”- Validate each other’s feelings because what your spouse is feeling is real and true for him or her. Remember, you don’t need to win or to be right. Old hurts can heal as you respond differently to your spouse than he has been responded to in his “past life.” Becoming a healing agent, with empathy, understanding, non-defensiveness, and care.

- **Conflict #4: Conflicting Desires**
- Wherever you have two people, you will have conflicting desires. It is one of the things that makes a relationship what it is. Two different people bring differences to the table. In fact, your differences are part of what brought you together.
- Normally, two giving people develop a pattern of give and take, and differences get negotiated. But sometimes they hit a stalemate. A few principles can help:
 1. Avoid Moralizing Your Preference- Make sure you realize that your desire is not a higher one than your spouse's. Do not try to win by making yours right and your spouse's wrong. These are preferences, not laws.
 2. Empathize with and Understand the Importance of Your Spouse's Desires- Avoid devaluing what your spouse wants. Stay away from statements that make it sound as if what she wants is less important than what you want. Her desires are just as real to her as yours are to you. Validate her desires as real and good.
 3. Move to Meet Your Spouse's Desires Before You Meet Your Own- Seek to make sure that your spouse gets his or her desires met before yours are met, and you will avoid most arguments. In reality, this is not going to happen often, but your attitude is what is important. Let your spouse pick the car, or the movie, or the vacation this time. There will always be a next one.
 4. If Necessary, Keep an Account of Yours, Mine, and Ours- Make 2 columns on a piece of paper to keep score of how much time and money you have to spend. Figure out whose "turn" it was to get to have their way with that night or that dollar. Then alternate. One could choose the restaurant or the movie one night, and the other the next. One could spend the first one hundred dollars, and then the other. And so on. This system is valuable for couples with differing personalities who drift into unconscious patterns. If you keep an account, you will guard against the passive spouse becoming the perpetual loser. The more assertive one will finally get some limits.
 5. Don't Define an "I" Choice as a "We" Choice- Some spouses who enjoy "togetherness" define what they want as being for the *relationship*, when it is really for *themselves*. They might choose to spend all of their free time doing things together, thinking that it is a "we" choice when in reality it is an "I" choice. What they should be saying is, "I am choosing to spend my allotted time with you, and that must come out of my account." Some people feel cheated when the other spouse wants to do something by himself or herself. They feel as if they always give to the relationship and as if the other person is being selfish. This is not true. They are not "giving" to the relationship; they are making personal choices that include the other person because they don't like doing things alone or apart from the relationship. Make sure that when you want your spouse to do a "we" thing, he or she is really wanting to do that as well. If not, and he or she goes along, remember it is for you and not for the both of you. Count it in your own column.
 6. Make Sure "We's" Are Agreed Upon- Make sure you both sign off on activities that are really for the two of you. When you both have to sacrifice for something, make sure that you are on the same page in wanting it and agreeing to it. Otherwise, make sure that you are freely giving in to the other person and will not carry a grudge or an emotional debt.
 7. Question Your Preferences- Some of the things on which you take strong stances may not be true desires. As James tells us, we sometimes want things for wrong motives (James 4:3). God wants to grant to us our real desires, but sometimes what we want are not true desires. They come from motives other than those from our heart. These false desires try to fill empty places and cover feelings of

insecurity. Check the motives for your desires. You might find more lasting fulfillment giving to the relationship instead of your “pleasures.”

8. Expand and Grow- Relationships can grow you and expand you if you let them. Try to see the activity through your spouse’s eyes, and you might learn to enjoy something that you never would have thought possible.

- **Conflict #5: Desires of One Person Versus the Needs of the Relationship**
- Sometimes the desire of one spouse conflicts with the needs of the relationship. The rule here is that there is no rule. If there were a rule, it would be to find balance over the long term. No relationship is going to survive if all the members are not getting some desires met; vice versa, no relationship is going to thrive if the members get their individual needs met and the relationship always suffers. It is good for a relationship at times to “serve” its members. The problem comes when the marriage always serves one member and never the others. Make sure that over the long haul the marriage goes on the back burner at times for each member and that each member has learned that the marriage is more important than his or her individual wants.
- Marriage means giving up some individual “rights” for the sake of the marriage. But keep it in balance, making sure that the marriage gets served first. Here are some hints:
 - Remember that the marriage comes first. Give the best to the relationship before your individual desires. Earn the equity to spend later.
 - Be clear about what you want. Don’t passively wish. Tell your spouse clearly.
 - Be excited about what your spouse wants for himself or herself individually. You are “one,” and it is for you as well, even if seems that it is just “for him or her” right now.
 - Make sure that your individual desires that take away from the relationship over the long haul are not unbalanced in terms of what your spouse gets.
 - As much as possible, make long-term plans for individual things that take away from the marriage. This way you can plan together to sacrifice, and it is not spur of the moment. Immediate requests feel more like demands.
- **Conflict #6: Known Versus Unknown Problems**
- When we are in denial about some problem, it can destroy us. Some people are not “in denial,” but they have a “blind spot.” We all have aspects to our personalities and character that we do not about.
- In marriage, your spouse may know more about you than you do. The trick to growth is becoming partner to this secret knowledge. There is a difference between known and unknown problems, however, and they should be handled differently.
 - **Conflict in Known Problems-** If you have talked about a certain pattern before, agree about what you will do if the pattern returns. Agree that the person with the problem is responsible for it once he knows about it, and each party knows what to expect if it happens again. For some, this may mean, “I am not going to tell you again. I am just going to enforce the consequence we agreed upon.” In principle, the person knows that he has the problem and should be working on it. If you have talked about one partner’s tardiness, for example, then you might agree ahead of time that if the partner is tardy again, he will get left behind. Or if one spends too much again, she will have to work it off.
 - If you have talked before and want each other’s help, then confronting will be used not for policing, but for making someone aware. “I cannot see when I am doing that. Please let me know.” Then confrontation is an attempt to heal, not to control the problem.

- If you know about the problem, the plan to fix it is your responsibility. You are in charge of your own character issues. Don't blame your spouse in any way for something that you already know about yourself.
- If it is your partner's problem and she knows about it, don't enable her. If you do, you are part of the problem. Follow through with the consequences you have agreed upon.
- **Conflict in Unknown Problems**
- Agree with each other that you have permission to tell each other about what you notice. If you are partners in discovery, then you will experience it as teamwork and not control.
- When we are confronted, be open. Don't be defensive. Accept the feedback, at least agreeing to look at yourself and see if it is true.
- Seek feedback from others also. If your friends tell you the same thing as your spouse, you might believe it more.
- Ask your spouse to show you each time it happens so that you can see the pattern. We tend to think a mistake or problem is a "one-time occurrence" if we don't know that it is true about us. Catching yourself over and over will slowly convince you.
- Give grace to each other. In areas that are new discoveries for your spouse, change is not going to be immediate. Give him time.

Chapter 14- Resolving Conflict with a Boundary-Loving Spouse

Boundary Lovers

- In any situation requiring change, two major issues appear right off the bat.
 1. The issue to be dealt with
 2. The ability of the person to deal with the issue
- If number two is good, then in most cases, number one will not be a problem. People who have the ability to hear feedback and listen we call "boundary lovers."
- The ones who listen to feedback-the "boundary lovers"- are characterized by several traits:
 - They are open to feedback and correction from others and gain understanding as a result of confrontation or feedback (Proverbs 15:32).
 - They don't become defensive when their spouse shares feedback.
 - They take ownership of their own problems, choices, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors.
 - They have the ability to see themselves and observe their behavior.
 - They value the treasures of their spouse.
 - They see their spouse as an individual, separate from themselves, with separate experiences.
 - They allow their spouse the freedom to be different from them.
 - They respect the freedom and space of their spouse.
 - They see their own need for growth and change.
- All of these traits show that someone is open to the truth, to the freedom of the other, to responsibility, and to love. If you do have an attitude of openness, a desire for your spouse and you to experience freedom and love, then you will be able to talk through problems and help each other. If you are both boundary lovers, you have a conflict, not two.

An Overall Strategy

- For all kinds of conflicts, the Bible suggests the following predictable path over and over again:
 1. Observation- You can't fix a problem you do not see. One of you has to notice the problem first and see it as a problem or a conflict.
 2. Confrontation- You cannot fix a problem that you don't talk about. Speak honestly with each other. As Paul says, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body" (Ephesians 4:25). But speak the truth in love as you let your spouse know what is wrong.
 3. Ownership, Grief, and Apology- If you are the problem-or at least part of it-own it. If you have been hurt, own your hurt and communicate it. If you are the one who is doing the hurting, then confess and apologize. If you are the wounded party, forgive as well as express your hurt.
 4. Repentance- Once you see your part in something, repent. Change your mind about the problem and change direction.
 5. Involvement in the Process- Problems do not go away immediately. Become involved in whatever process will be necessary for change. It may be counseling or some other form of structured help, but commit to it and stay involved.
 6. Reexamination- Have some system of reexamination. Just because you have faced something does not mean it is gone forever. Get a check-up from those to whom you have made yourself accountable. And then continue to get reexamined for other things as well. Remember the basic rules of all communication:
 - Listen and seek to understand the other before you seek to be understood. Make it your mission to really understand what your spouse is feeling, wanting, or desiring.
 - Actively empathize and use reflective listening to let the other person know you understand. "So it really hurts you when I do that. I get it." Or use statements to let them know that you know. Active listening really confirms to someone that you are hearing and taking seriously how he or she feels.
 - Do not devalue or explain away what the other person is feeling or saying. Don't defend. Just listen.
 - Clarify to make sure you understand. Ask questions.
 - Use "I" statements that show you are taking responsibility for what you are feeling or wanting. "When you are late, I begin to feel not cared for." This is much better than saying, "You make me feel so unloved." The latter is blaming, and the former is communicating feelings.

Chapter 15- Resolving Conflict with a Boundary-Resistant Spouse

Boundaries Aren't Always Welcome in Marriage

- God designed boundaries for some very good reasons, all of which benefit a couple. Boundaries protect love. They enhance freedom. They allow people to be separate and stay connected. They define responsibility so that people know what their tasks are.

- Love can only flourish and deepen when two people embrace the pain of receiving and respecting their mate's boundaries. So many good things result when both mates preserve the boundaries of the other:
 - You increase your ability to feel compassion for your spouse's needs, desires, and hurts.
 - You develop self-control and patience.
 - You become humble and self-correcting.
 - You appreciate your mate for who he is, not for his usefulness to you.
 - You depend less on your spouse's reactions and more on your own values to make you happy.
 - You learn about how God respects our boundaries with him.
- For people who control others or who don't take ownership of their own lives, the boundary message doesn't come as good news or something that brings freedom. In fact, controlling spouses hear that they are hurting someone they love. They hear that things need to change, and change is difficult and often painful. These changes may involve several things:
 - Allowing your spouse to say no to you
 - Humbly admitting you have been trying to control your spouse
 - Submitting to God's process of learning boundaries and self-control
 - Respecting the freedom of your spouse
 - Restraining the tendency to withdraw from your spouse, attack her, or make her feel guilty
 - Becoming aware of your helplessness to truly control anyone
 - Asking for your spouse's feedback when you cross her boundaries
- It is realistic to identify pain as pain, even if it is growth-producing pain. The painful discipline of boundaries will eventually bear good results in our lives.

Character Is What You Do with the Pain of Boundaries

- Good character welcomes the pain of boundaries, as a person of character wants to love God and others and grow spiritually and emotionally. A person of problem character, however, refuses to accept his status as someone who sometimes needs correction and limits from others. This scary position is the position of a mocker, who hates those who rebuke him (Proverbs 9:8). Even more frightening, it is the position of one who is attempting to take on the role of God, who alone in the universe does not need to be corrected.

How the Boundary Buster Sees the Issue

- Often one of the greatest problems between couples is that the boundary-loving spouse doesn't understand the perspective of the boundary-resistant one. The boundary lover doesn't grasp that the boundary resister really doesn't see things the same way she does.
- People who don't respect others' boundaries have a basic attitude toward life: I should be able to do what I want.
- The boundary resistant spouse feels that he should be able to do what he wants whenever he wants. With that as his operative principle in life, he will challenge and protest any boundary until he begins to grow up. Boundaries say that you cannot do what you want all the time.

Ignorance Is Not a Character Problem

- We are not saying that all boundary-busting spouses have a character problem. Many times what appears to be selfishness is actually ignorance. The spouse may simply not know that her behavior is hurtful or irritating to the other.

The Spouse of the Boundary Buster Needs Scrutiny

- Be aware that discovering that your spouse is a boundary buster doesn't mean he is any worse a person than you are.
- Most of the time, the mate of a boundary-resistant spouse has much to repent of also, such as the following:
 - Pretending that everything is all right
 - Not speaking the truth
 - Being emotionally absent and withdrawing instead of bringing up problems
 - Not following up on consequences
 - Nagging and not acting responsibly
 - Being passively revengeful
 - Being self-righteous and condemning
 - Gossiping about your spouse but not telling him your feelings

Causes of Boundary Resistance

- Before you address the problem of the boundary-resistant spouse, you need to understand the reasons for boundary resisting to help you know better how to approach the issues.
- **Empathic Failure**- To accept boundaries, a person must be able to see the effects of his lack of boundaries on others.
- **Irresponsibility**- Some spouses have a low sense of ownership of their actions. They feel that they should be able to do whatever they want and suffer no consequences for it. None of us take responsibility for our own lives gracefully; it has to be built into us by many painful experiences. And some people have escaped this lesson because parents and friends have enabled their behavior and rescued them. Behind an irresponsible spouse is always a safety-net person, either in the past or the present.
- **Inability to Receive Limits and Stay Free**- At other times, a spouse may resist boundaries because of a split within his own soul. He may be unable to receive confrontation or consequences due to a lack of integration of love and freedom.
- **Control of Others**- Some spouses resist boundaries due to their attempts to control, manipulate, or dominate their mates. They are unable to see their spouse as having separate and equal feelings and ideas. Rather, they believe that their way is the only way. Instead of mutually solving problems, they negate and minimize the freedom of their spouse. When a spouse is either passively or aggressively controlling, he needs to learn that his denial of ownership not only hurts others, but also hurts him and keeps him from being free.
- **Denial of Imperfection**- Spouses who refuse to admit weaknesses and faults can be major boundary busters. They stay highly invested in not being "wrong" or "bad."
- **Retaliation**- Sometimes a marriage can be troubled by a spouse who takes revenge on perceived or real transgressions by his mate. When he feels wronged, he feels justified in more wrongdoing: an eye for an eye. Your mate will not always handle your tender feelings in the most careful way. You may feel justifiably hurt and angry about his treatment of you. Yet, revenge belongs to God, not us (Romans 12:19). Take your hurt feelings to people and places where you can heal, and then learn to solve the problem, not take revenge on the one who hurt you.

- **Transference**- The intimacy generated by marriage can revive old feelings toward other significant relationships. Intimacy begets emotions, and emotions that have not been worked through can come out in confusing ways in marriage, causing boundary problems. The confusing state of having feelings toward a spouse that are about someone else is called *transference*.
- **Specific Context of Resistance**- Some spouses are empathic, humble, correctable, and respectful to boundaries in all areas but one. This “pocket area” becomes a no man’s land for the marriage. Both spouses learn to skirt around it, as it tends to bring out fights, eruptions, and unresolved conflict. Generally speaking, there can be more than one cause for these situations:
 - Lack of information and experience. A spouse may simply have no clue as to how this area affects the other person.
 - Past hurts in that area. The critical wife may have been shamed by her parents in public and may be reacting in that specific arena.
 - Character issues. This one visible problem may be the sign of a deeper, hidden character problem. The deeper you investigate, the more a consistent pattern emerges. The sexually insensitive husband may be self-centered sexually because he can hide his needs in the other arenas of life. However, a discerning eye can see that his lovingness in other areas may be shallow.

If It Is Character, You Have a Job To Do

- Let’s suppose your spouse is aware of your feelings and concerns, but ignores, minimizes, or otherwise resists your boundaries. If this is your situation, you have some work ahead of you. It is hard work, but it can also be the most productive thing you will ever do for your marriage.
- You must not approach this problem as if you are a team. At this point, you have an adversary. Understand that you are on your own, within the marriage, in approaching the issue. Actually, you are not alone; you have God and your boundary-loving friends. But you don’t expect much cooperation for your spouse.
- A few things you may be tempted to do will not help the situation at all. Remember these, tape them in your wallet, and DON’T DO THEM!
 - Don’t deny or minimize the situation if it is a significant boundary problem. Hiding from reality doesn’t change reality.
 - Don’t ignore the situation, hoping it will get better. Time alone does not heal character immaturity.
 - Don’t become more compliant and pleasing, hoping love will fix everything. Again, character issues demand more than love in order to mature.
 - Don’t nag. Repeating the same protest over and over never changed anyone (Proverbs 21:9).
 - Don’t be constantly surprised at your spouse’s behavior. This is a sign of a defensive hoping against hope. When out-of-control people have no external forces causing them pain, they generally stay out-of-control. Expect things to stay the same until you initiate changes within the marriage.
 - Don’t blame. Very few marriage-boundary conflicts involve an all-innocent and an all-guilty party. Take ownership of the part of the issue, taking the log out of your own eye (Matthew 7:5).
 - Don’t take total ownership of the problem. If you rescue your partner from his part, you will only make the issue worse (Proverbs 19:19).

Your To-Do List

- We also want you to have several specific principles of operation in mind. These will give you a way to approach your spouse with grace and truth.
 - **Make Soul Connections-** If you deal with a boundary-resistant spouse, you will encounter conflict. Your spouse may become angry with you, withdraw from you, or try to make you feel guilty. This struggle will threaten the closeness you have with him. Your hopes to fulfill your God-given need for love may be jeopardized when you set boundaries with your spouse. Enlarge your heart to include more than your spouse, and bring your needy, dependent parts to these other people. They will serve as a resource for comfort, encouragement, and strength during the stress of boundary negotiation in your marriage.
 - **Grow and Own-** God doesn't want you to come into relationship simply to set limits in your marriage. He wants *you*. So, what often happens is what needs to happen. As you open up, confessing your needs and faults to loving people, you grow spiritually and emotionally. Good things happen inside. You deal with old hurts. You become more honest. You "find your heart." You forgive and let go of things. You center your life around God and his life for you. In short, you grow up in him (Ephesians 4:15-16).
 - Many things can happen during this process that can help you prepare for dealing with your boundary problem with your spouse:
 - You may discover why your spouse has this particular issue.
 - You may find out why you have had trouble setting limits.
 - You may learn how to be more honest and confronting in safe relationships to prepare you for confrontation in the marriage.
 - You may learn how to receive love and support when you fail in your limits and need grace, encouragement, and feedback.
 - **Identify the Specific Issue-** Once you are connected and in the boundary-setting process, you will need to find out what the specific boundary issue is. This important part of the process cannot be completed instantly. You will need to know the following aspects:
 - What boundary of yours is being violated: "My husband is chronically late. My boundary of being on time is violated."
 - How it affects you and your love for your spouse: "I feel devalued and less important than his other commitments. It distances me from him."
 - Whether or not the problem is a pattern or an occasional event: "It happens several times a week, and has for years."
 - Why it is important enough to risk conflict over it: "I don't want to resent him. I want to feel close to him. And I want him to be on time for meals and family meetings."
 - You may find it harder than you think to identify a specific boundary issue. When you deal with a specific issue, the question of character change may arise. Ask yourself, "Am I requesting my spouse to change her heart or simply her behavior? Am I asking for a character change or a boundary change?"
 - It is generally best to request the deeper attitude change first for several reasons:
 - Solving the internal issue helps solve the outward symptom.
 - Asking for internal change often helps you learn about your spouse's attitude toward boundaries.
 - Everyone, even a boundary-resistant spouse, needs to be invited to change internally before dealing with consequences.

- Sadly, a boundary-resistant spouse will most likely negate your request for internal change. This is the nature of resistance: an opposition to seeing or owning an issue. When you have humbly asked for the internal change, and she resists, move on to the specific behavioral level.
- **Validate Your Spouse-** Resistant spouses still need to know that you understand their perspective. People have a difficult time changing when their feelings are negated and dismissed. Validation and grace soften the burden of change.
- **Love Your Spouse-** In boundary conflict resolution you need to communicate that your goal is to be close to your spouse, not to hurt her. Boundaries are about protecting love. They are not about changing people, beating them up, punishing them, or showing them their evil ways.
- If you don't establish that you are trying to solve a problem so that love can reign, you risk being seen as a controlling or critical parent by your spouse. Show her that you value the connection above all.
- **Create a Level Playing Field-** Here is some hard news: you have to earn the right to require your spouse to change. Look actively at how you may be contributing to the problem, and make any necessary changes.
- What is even harder is that you need to make your changes, even if your spouse does not. This may sound unfair, but it is one of the more important realities of life. God wants to work in you to grow you up and mature you. He wants to make you more like him. Do not depend on your spouse to grow up before you do.
- Look at your own contribution to the boundary conflict. Ask your spouse. Ask honest and safe friends. And ask God to search your heart (Psalm 139:23-24). Make the necessary changes. They do help you earn the right to ask for change. Yet, on a deeper level, they are what molds you into God's likeness.
- **Request Change-** Remember all the above elements as you approach your spouse with a request for him to respect a boundary of yours. Let him know about your love and your own faults. But be clear and specific about your request. Try not to leave room for misinterpretation:
- **Give Your Spouse Time and Patience-** This may be the first time you have addressed the boundary problem with your spouse. Or it may be the first time you have brought it up appropriately. If so, simply make the request and allow some time to observe her response. Before you set up consequences, see what happens when you ask correctly, appealing to love and empathy. Remember that you are always evaluating yourself, her, and the process during this time. By giving her time to respond, you are learning whether or not consequences are necessary.
- Some boundary-resistant spouses need time to adjust to the new reality of a mate with boundaries. She may not be used to your being direct, immediate, and honest about what you don't like in the marriage. This stands to reason, as to some extent you have trained her to bust your boundaries. Now you are changing the rules, and it takes time to adapt.

- ***Establish Appropriate Consequences-*** Stating the boundary, however, may not be enough. You need to establish some consequence for your spouse's transgression so that he will experience some discomfort for his irresponsibility. A consequence has to have several very important characteristics:
 - *Designed to help with reality and protect you, not designed to control or change your spouse.* Boundaries and consequences are not about fixing someone or making them choose better. They are about allowing appropriate cause and effect so that your spouse will experience the pain of irresponsibility and then change.
 - *Deliberate, and not impulsive or set in anger.* Think through, prayerfully and with friends, what an appropriate consequence might be. It is not about getting even. It is about getting out of enabling your spouse and about protecting yourself from evil.
 - *As reality-based as possible.* You want reality to be your spouse's instructor.
 - *Appropriately severe.* Evaluate how chronic, destructive, and severe the boundary violation is. The consequence needs to be serious enough to matter, but not so severe that *it*, rather than the behavior, becomes the issue.
 - *Enforceable.* Make sure this is something you can and will do. You need to make sure you have the power and resources to set the limit. If you can't tell the pastor you are having trouble in your marriage, don't threaten to do that.
 - *Preservative of your spouse's freedom.* Don't set a consequence by saying, "You have to," "You must," or, "I will make you..." Consequences are not something you do to control your spouse. They are reactions to his choices. Let him make his choices, but prepare your reactions.
 - *As immediate as possible.* Just as kids need quick consequences, so do spouses. Your spouse can make the association between his action and the results if they are close together in time.
 - *Respectful of his role as spouse.* Stay away from humiliating or punitive consequences such as making fun of him or making sarcastic remarks.
 - *Designed to be modified as your spouse changes.* Consequences don't have to be forever. As your spouse owns and repents, you can change the consequences. However, be sure that change has truly occurred over some period of time. "I'm sorry" is not enough to let go of the consequence. The other side of this, however, is that you may have to escalate the severity of the consequence if your spouse behaves worse.

<i>Boundary: I want you to</i>	<i>Consequence: I will</i>
Be less messy at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confiscate/give away what I pick up that is yours • Stop doing your laundry
End your chronic lateness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave for the meeting without you
Stop demeaning me in public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be emotionally distant • Leave the event
Give up your deception and lying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotionally pull away to protect myself or ask you to leave (depending on severity) until you agree to counseling
Cease your temper tantrums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave the room/home for a period of time • Join a support group for raging spouses • Ask our friends for help
Quit overspending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove your credit cards • Open separate accounts • Stop paying for certain expenses and have you take responsibility for them
End your drinking/substance problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up an intervention • Have you leave home until treated
Deal with your sexual problems: pornography, prostitution, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End sexual intimacy • Require that you work on issue in outside relationships to stay in home
End the affair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require that you leave home, not returning at the soonest until the affair is over and counseling entered
Stop your abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave home and go to safety • Contact authorities: police/church/counselors

Examples of Consequences:

- **Warn Your Spouse-** Appropriately warn your spouse. If you have requested change and have given time with no result, she needs to be aware that you will now begin setting limits. This accomplishes two purposes. First, your spouse has a chance to repent before suffering (Ezekiel 3:18-19). Second, you are not reacting impulsively or secretly, but in grace and longsuffering.
- **Follow Through-** A boundary without a consequence is nagging. Be sure to follow through with the limit you have set. Otherwise, you train your spouse that he can do whatever he wants and that nothing worse than words will befall him.
- You may encounter problems following through. Guilt, fear of loss of love, and fear of your spouse's escalating behavior may cause you to hesitate. If this happens, make sure that you surround yourself with loving, honest people who will support you in this process. They can encourage you, protect you, assure you of the rightness of your stance, and be with you in the process (Hebrews 12:12-13).
- **Observe and Evaluate Over Time-** Again, let time pass after you follow through with consequences. Through this experience you will learn to understand your spouse better. Some mates will require only a few examples to see that irresponsibility or selfishness is painful. Others may need more time, and you may even have to change the consequences to fit the situation better. Still others, sadly, will have no interest in changing.
- When someone wants to live a life unaffected by the feelings and hurts of others, that behavior goes against everything that is true about God. Yet God gives people great freedom to be selfish and hurtful, because this freedom may one day be the freedom through which they choose his ways. As C.S. Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*, "If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad....Why, then, did God give (humans) free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having."
- If this is your situation, understand that your boundaries are more for you than for your spouse. They are to protect and structure you, and only secondarily to change and motivate him.

Deal With Escalation and Anger

- Don't be surprised or shocked if your spouse escalates the behavior that troubles you. Your spouse may get messier, more controlling, or more of a spendthrift. Be prepared for this. Warn again, make the consequences stricter, or simply make sure you are sticking to them consistently. Some spouses wake up and smell the coffee after a few escalations, and some test you longer.
- Handle his anger and hatred with firmness. Many spouses back off an appropriate boundary they have set because they can't tolerate being hated. Allow the hatred to exist. Your spouse is angry with you for saying no to him. He has the right to hate your no. Just understand where it comes from, don't react to it, and stay connected to God and others.
- Don't be surprised if you begin questioning yourself. You may do this especially if your mate protests, blames you, becomes angry with you, or intensifies her resistance. You may doubt whether your boundary setting is the right thing to do.

Leave Permanently

- It is sad but necessary to bring up the ultimate consequence in marriage: divorce. Divorce does not fix a marriage. It ends it. It is much less than God's ideal, but he does allow it in certain circumstances, such as adultery or desertion by an unbelieving spouse. Even then, God does not mandate it.

- There are many steps to take before you consider divorce, as you can see from this chapter. Divorce can only be the last step in a long process that includes prayer, invitation, change, patience, consequences, and love.
- Develop your boundaries and consequences so that, ultimately, you aren't the one leaving. Rather, construct them so that your righteousness and God's painful realities will force your spouse over time either to relent and change, or to decide against you and God. In that way, your spouse must be responsible for the consequences of leaving you, not you for leaving him.
- Remember that God supports you as you follow his ways. He will not leave you during the conflicts and dark times. Cling to him and your friends as you establish good limits for you and your marriage.

Chapter 16- Avoiding the Misuse of Boundaries in Marriage

- Misuse of boundaries often results in increased alienation instead of increased love. Here are some examples:
 - A wife whose first and only boundary is to divorce her husband
 - A husband who controls his wife but calls his actions "setting boundaries"
 - A wife who uses consequences and withdrawal to get revenge on her husband
 - A husband who excuses his rage attacks by saying he is simply being truthful
- These are all grievous misunderstandings of what the Bible teaches about becoming a righteous, responsible, free person, a person with good boundaries. Boundaries were not designed to end relationships, but to preserve and deepen them. With couples, boundaries are ultimately for working within the marriage, not outside of it.

The Purpose of Suffering

- Boundaries are not about an escape from suffering, nor an escape from responsibility. In fact, when we set limits in marriage, sometimes we suffer more, not less. When a wife takes a stand to disagree with her opinionated husband's desire to plan their weekend his way, she will suffer for her stand. Yet it may be the right thing for both of them.
- Through suffering we learn to get our needs met, give to others, and yet relinquish demands that all creatures in the universe bow down to us. Suffering helps us survive, even thrive, while giving up the wish to be God.
- Here are some of the benefits that suffering can bring to marriage:
 - Growing in faith that our unseen God is helping and supporting
 - Learning to hold onto one's values in tough times
 - Becoming a truthful person when it is not popular
 - Delaying gratification for a future and better goal
 - Staying connected to others instead of withdrawing in self-absorption
 - Learning to live in forgiveness with an imperfect spouse
 - Learning to accept forgiveness for being an imperfect spouse

Suffering for the Wrong Reasons

- The confusion about suffering, boundaries, and marriage often comes, not because spouses try to avoid growing up, but because they have been suffering for some time for the wrong reasons.
- Ungodly suffering comes from either doing the wrong thing or not doing the right thing. This type of pain is a signal to us that something bad is happening. It is a warning to change a behavior, an attitude, or a feeling.

- The rescuing spouse of the rageaholic is not experiencing godly suffering, the kind that comes from doing the right thing; instead, she is experiencing ungodly suffering, the kind that comes from doing the wrong thing.
- Godly suffering changes, also, but in a different way. The process continues as growth continues.
- God does not want you to set boundaries in your marriage to end suffering and pain. He wants you to end the ungodly suffering, which produces no growth, and enter his suffering, which always brings good results.

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Ungodly Suffering</i>	<i>Godly Suffering</i>
An overspending wife	Nagging or silence	Taking the credit cards and enduring her wrath
A critical husband	Complying to win his approval	Leaving the room when he criticizes and letting him be angry about it
A wife who controls by guilt messages	Resentfully doing what she wants	Confronting her covert control and letting her call him an unloving person
A husband who doesn't help with housework	Pretending he's a cute little boy and overlooking it	Letting him cook his own meals until he helps out, and allowing him to pout

- None of these scenarios has a painless response. So if you're going to endure discomfort, you may as well have it do some good. Remember that Jesus enduring the pain of the cross for the joy that was set before him (Hebrews 12:2). Don't set limits to live an anesthetized life. Set them to build love, honesty, and freedom in your marriage.

Setting Boundaries to Avoid Growth

- Understand how hard growth and change are for your spouse, especially when she is in denial or out of control. Give her the same grace that you also need to mature. Below are some of the elements you will need to apply in your marriage along with boundaries.
 - **Love-** Love is the most important element of any relationship. It is the essential framework for how to treat your mate.
 - **Others-** Not only do you need to speak from love, but also you need to be receiving care, support, and encouragement from God and others outside of your marriage. We need relationship with people to fill us up inside, especially when we have marriage struggles.
 - **Ownership-** There are almost no marriage problems in which one spouse contributes one hundred percent and the other, zero percent. Humbly take responsibility for what you have done, apologize, ask forgiveness, and change.
 - **Invitation-** Whatever the problem between you and your spouse, invite him to change before you set limits. With empathy and love, request that he make a change.
 - **Warning-** When we warn, we tell our spouse two things: first, we tell him that something painful might happen in the future; second, we tell him that his behavior will help determine what happens. Often, knowing that a consequence is in our future helps us take ownership of ourselves.

- **Patience-** Many times, a spouse will appear impatient and intolerant of his mate's irresponsibility or control. Once the issue is exposed, he will demand instant change and will be quite critical when she fails, regresses, or resists the process of growth. This often happens because he has been silently suffering for so long that he feels he has indeed been patient.
- However, silent suffering is not patience. Such suffering is often driven by fear or avoidance of conflict. Patience is different. Patience allows the process to happen while you are also providing the ingredients of growth. Make sure you are loving and truthful while you allow your spouse time to grow. Remember how long it has taken for you to change, and remember God's patience with us: "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish" (2 Peter 3:9).
- **Consequence-** When love, support, invitation, warning, and patience are in play, you may have to follow through on your consequence. Consequences protect you and also help your spouse deal with the reality of his actions. Be consistent but loving. Don't set your consequence out of anger, revenge, or punishment.
- **Renegotiation-** Many boundaries can be changed over time as a spouse matures and changes. You may not have to keep a limit forever, as what you make external becomes internalized in your marriage, as it becomes a part of who you two are. This is a mark of growing up: what was outside becomes a part of us inside.
- **Forgiveness-** Finally, be actively and constantly in the process of forgiveness. To forgive is to cancel a debt. You need to both forgive your spouse and request forgiveness from your spouse.

Submission

- Few passages in the Bible have been subject to more misunderstanding and misuse than this teaching on **submission**: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior...Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy" (Ephesians 5:22-23,25).
- Basically, this passage establishes a sense of order in a marriage. It places final responsibility for the family on the shoulders of the husband. He is the "head," or the leader of the family, as Christ is the leader of the church. The passage asks the wife to submit to her husband's leadership, as we all submit to Christ's leadership.
- What does this leadership look like? It is basically the leadership Christ provides the church: He died for her and makes her whole. He looks out for her growth and best interest, cleanses her from guilt, provides resources for her growth, and protects her from the world, the flesh, and the devil. He helps her to invest her talents, heals her hurts, takes her suffering on himself, supports her in trials, and comes alongside of her when she falls.
- A leader is a giving servant who is committed to the best for the one(s) he or she is leading. If a wife is resisting a husband who is loving, truthful, protective, and providing for her well-being, then something is wrong. The commandment for her to submit, to respond to her husband assumes he is loving her in this way. So, whether we are speaking of the church or of marriage, the commandment provides a beautiful picture of a sacrificial love and the response to such a love.

- What submission does not mean is that a husband just tells a wife what to do. Leadership does not mean domination. Marriages that work best have equal partners with differing roles. Decisions are best made mutually, as both parties with their different strengths bring in different perspectives. Loving men would never make some decision that would hurt his wife. He needs her input, and she needs his. They are interdependent, and they are partners in the marriage.
- Another problem may occur when a wife stands up for the right thing, and her husband tells her she is not being submissive. She may confront her husband's attitudes or addiction or lying or some other ungodly behavior, and then she is called "unsubmissive." Wives are always to submit to God and his laws above those of their husbands. If their husbands are doing something evil, the wives are to stand up to that evil.
- There is also the problem of a controlling woman who wants to be in charge of everything. Selfishness knows no gender lines.
- The idea of submission is never meant to allow someone to overstep another's boundaries. Submission only has meaning in the context of boundaries, for boundaries promote self-control and freedom. If a wife is not free and in control of herself, she is not submitting anyway. She is a slave subject to a slave driver, and *she is out of the will of God*. As Galatians 5:1 says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." If a wife is being put under some law that says she is "bad" if she does not submit to her husband's cruelty and problems, then she is not free at all. Likewise, if she is not free to say no without being deemed "bad," then she is not free at all. So the concept of boundaries as the "freedom to do good" in no way contrasts with the idea of submission. A free person is the only one who can submit.
- The idea of submission aside, selfishness is never good for any relationship. If both of you are not using your freedom and boundaries to give to and to serve each other, then you do not understand love. Use your freedom to give, sacrifice, and love your spouse, whether you are husband or wife. If you do that, with the result that most of your arguments are over who gets the chance to do the sacrificing, submission will never be an issue.

Boundaries and Divorce

- Divorce is not a boundary in a relationship. Divorce is an end to a relationship.
- Often people will get to a point in a boundary-less marriage when they just cannot take it anymore. And they are right. God never meant any relationship to be lived without boundaries, for boundaries enforce his righteous principles. But God never meant for divorce to be the boundary either, and he certainly did not mean for it to be the first real stand that someone takes. That move is basically a defense against growth and change.
- God's solution for "I can't live that way anymore" is basically, "Good! Don't live that way anymore. Set firm limits against evil behaviors that are designed to promote change and redemption. Get the love and support you need from other places to take the kind of stance that I do to help redeem relationship. Suffer long, but suffer in the right way." And when done God's way, chances are much better for redemption.
- People with real boundaries could avoid many divorces. But they might have to take a strong stance; separate, not participate in the behavioral patterns against which they are setting boundaries; and demand righteousness before participating in the relationship again. If they become the light, then the other person either changes or goes away. This is why, in most cases, we say you really should not have to be the one who divorces. If you are doing the right things, and the other person is truly evil, he most likely will leave

- you. But you can rest in the assurance that you have done everything possible to redeem the relationship.
- The problem is that sometimes a person thinks that he is setting boundaries, but in reality all he is doing is continuing to blame his spouse and demand change in her without changing himself first.
 - Here is a reiteration of the path we suggested in our book *Safe People* on how to repair a relationship.
 1. Start from a supported position so that you have the strength to deal with your spouse.
 2. Solve your own problems and act righteously toward your spouse. Don't contribute to the problem with your own issues.
 3. Use others to intervene (counselors, pastors, friends, family, other people with leverage).
 4. Accept reality and grieve expectations. Forgive what has already happened.
 5. Give change a chance. After you have stopped enabling your spouse and have set good boundaries in the relationship, give it time. Your spouse may not believe you at first.
 6. Long suffering begins at this point, not earlier when you were contributing to the problem.
 7. After doing the right things for a long time, separation is sometimes the only helpful option until someone in denial decides to change. In the separation, do not give your spouse the benefits of marriage if he is not pursuing change. If someone is abusive, addicted, dangerous, or has other significant problems, a separation can change his life.
 - Boundaries in a marriage seek to change and redeem the relationship. Divorce should *never* be the first boundary. You need to set boundaries in the context of relationship, not for the purpose of ending relationship. Take a stance that you will not participate in the relationship until the destruction ends. This is a boundary that helps. But, if you take that stance, make sure that the problem is truly the other person's and that you have followed all of God's steps above.
 - By writing this book we want ungodly suffering in a relationship to end. But we also want redemption to happen. End your suffering and see if the boundaries you set to end your suffering can be used to bring about redemption and reconciliation as well.