

Establishing Boundaries (Part 1)

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Imagine that you are standing in the middle of 25ft circle in the middle of a school gymnasium. The circle represents your life. Everything inside the circle is you and everything outside the circle is not you.

Think about what fills up your circle:

- Everything you care about
- All the things you believe and value
- Your opinions and points of view
- Your likes and dislikes
- The people and things you love
- The people and things you find attractive and unattractive
- The things you know and don't know
- The things you want
- The things that are uniquely YOU!

A million things make you different from the person next to you and every one of those differences establishes a boundary. The more you know about these things, yourself and how you operate, the more you can see and establish boundaries for greater harmony and a more efficacious ministry. Your boundaries, in turn, allow you to help others set appropriate boundaries in their own lives.

The problem is that even though boundaries are very important to our effectiveness in serving others, unless they are violated in some way most people don't think much about them. We instinctively honor some boundaries. For example, when someone steps too close to us within our "personal space" and we are uncomfortable, we simply move away or leave. We learn how to deflect questions that are "too personal" by changing the subject or pretending we didn't hear. We feel uneasy when a clerk at the retail store asks for our phone number or address before they ring up our purchases. We frequently give out the information; then we wish we hadn't, because the minute we give out our phone number we are sure that we will start getting a barrage of phone calls, probably at dinner time from persistent and, often annoying, telemarketers.

We don't usually think about these situations as violations of personal boundaries, but they are. They are simple boundary violations, but violations never the less. Sometimes we feel uncomfortable about something or upset about a situation that occurred to us without realizing that the reason we are responding in this way is because a boundary violation occurred. Beginning to recognize boundaries and notice how they impact all our relationships can make a real difference in our own lives and the effectiveness of our individual ministries.

"Boundaries" are the limits that define one person as separate from another or others. They promote and preserve personal integrity and give us a clear sense of self and how to function in relation to others.

Boundaries are unique to each individual and they are based on perceptions, personal histories, values, goals, culture and concerns. They bring order to life and definition to the way people let

others treat them. They also bring understanding to why others do and say the things they do in relationships.

Boundaries are inner limits and can be grounded in personal, moral, legal, or professional considerations and are physical and emotional. For example, one of the most basic boundaries is physical space. Think about it. When someone steps too close for comfort, what do you do? What do others do? How do you react? Do you step back or simply tolerate the behavior? What about other people's reactions? Are they the same as yours?

Another powerful boundary is language and one of the most powerful words human beings can use to establish a boundary is "no". Are you someone who has difficulty saying "no" or reacts negatively when someone else says "no" to you? Do you find it uncomfortable saying "no" to someone you care about, or someone in authority, or someone you respect? Do you react negatively or strongly when you hear "no" from someone you are trying to help?

"No" establishes a boundary.

As boundaries are not always physical, noticing your own and other peoples' reactions to that word can help you see where there are uncertain or unclear boundaries, showing you what it looks like to violate boundaries without touching someone.

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