



# BOUND- ARIES



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Healthy relationships require intentionality. We long for the qualities within a relationship that feel good: trust, acceptance, belonging, feeling valued, being listened to, and finding connection.

When we begin to build a framework within our relationships that creates the foundation for those qualities to be present, we start to thrive. We naturally begin to have more peace, more compassion, more empathy, more security, and more hope.

**BOUNDARIES ARE A VITAL PART OF THE HEALTHY FRAMEWORK FOR RELATIONSHIPS AND ARE MODELED FOR US IN SCRIPTURE.**



# HOW TO SET BOUNDARIES:



It's easy to question the message that we send when we set boundaries, wondering what people will think of us. Will we be perceived as mean or uncaring? We are called to be self-sacrificing, won't setting a boundary be selfish? These beliefs cause us to hesitate in setting boundaries that are healthy for ourselves and those around us. How do we overcome this concern and develop a deeper understanding of the value of boundaries?

## ***First, define boundaries.***

Put simply, boundaries communicate what we are willing to give to others and what we are willing to accept from others. I often say that healthy relationships have healthy boundaries, while unhealthy relationships have unhealthy or no boundaries.

## ***Next, understand the categories of boundaries.***

In the book *She Deserves Better* by Sheila Wray Gregoire, boundaries are divided into two distinct categories: Conviction Boundaries and Protection Boundaries.

**Conviction Boundaries** are boundaries that guide what we will and won't do based on our morals, values, and beliefs. Conviction boundaries help us stay in our integrity and remain congruent to our core identity. People see more about our character when we adhere to our Conviction Boundaries. For example, if honesty and speaking truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) guide my interactions, then lying to cover up a mistake that I make is a violation of my conviction boundary. This breach of my boundary leaves me feeling remorseful or guilty and will lead to insecurity and self-doubt.

**Protection Boundaries** are focused on emotional and physical health. Protection Boundaries allow us to protect our own sense of security and safety and provide that to other people. In parenting, this may mean teaching children that everyone deserves to feel safe by helping them understand that you won't let anyone hit them; therefore, you won't allow them to hit others. For teens and adults, this could include choosing not to engage in social media dialogue that leaves you feeling angry or anxious or refusing to stay in a conversation where there is a physical threat.

# HOW TO EMBRACE BOUNDARIES:



In her research on boundaries, Brenè Brown discovered that boundaries are important for helping us maintain compassion towards ourselves and others. She uses the acronym BIG - what Boundaries need to be in place for me that allow me to stay in my Integrity and hold a Generous view of others. This allows us to hold the idea that, just like us, people might be doing the best they can. This type of generous view increases our compassion while still recognizing the importance of setting a boundary. In other words, setting the boundary is not about being mean to someone, but is about responding from a place of loving kindness and clear communication.

**Knowing my own needs and trusting myself to express them to others creates authenticity in relationships.** To have authentic relationships, I need to show up. The real me needs to be engaged in the relationship. I shouldn't have to compromise my identity and integrity to be safe within relationships. Because I matter, my boundaries matter. If I consistently compromise my values, beliefs, and personhood to be in a relationship,

then I am developing a people-pleasing pattern of appeasing others. While there can be a false sense of peace and connection created, it is inauthentic because I am being inauthentic. Compromise is beautiful in relationships, but people-pleasing damages them.

Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV) can help guide us in how we engage in relationships. It says, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others."

This passage gives us permission to find balance of interests in our relationships with setting boundaries being how we communicate and negotiate those interests. Teaching others how to treat us through setting boundaries helps them learn how to love others in a healthy, God-honoring way. This means that we can be treated the way that Jesus wants us to be treated while we are treating others in a way that reflects his love for them.

# HOW TO KNOW WHEN OUR BOUNDARIES ARE VIOLATED—BY SOMEONE ELSE OR OURSELVES

When we become resentful and angry, when we withdrawal and shut down, or when we lean towards people-pleasing these can be clues that boundary violations are happening.

When we notice these emotions developing over the course of a relationship, it's important to get curious about the underlying reason. These emotions provide us with information about our experiences. Just like I respond in fear when I see a spider in my shower, I will respond with hurt and anger when I am being mistreated.

**God gives us a full range of emotions to help us understand our circumstances.** Jesus models emotion for us throughout the Bible. He is angry when he sees injustice (Matthew 21:12), he grieved when his friend died (John 11:33-35), he loves us (John 3:16, John 15, Romans 8:37-38), and he expressed compassion (Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:34). Jesus' example of expressing emotions can help us realize that our emotions also help inform us about our circumstances.

The goal of having healthy boundaries in relationships is to create trust and safety so that our relationships can thrive. When we fail to set boundaries, we can oscillate between anger or appeasing others. These responses are motivated by strong emotional energy.

Anger responses communicate that we feel out of control and are trying to regain control.

Appeasing responses stem from the fear that if we express who we are we will be rejected.

Without strong emotional energy, we remain silent. The balance between these two extremes is learning to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). This passage reminds us that setting boundaries requires that we speak up with love providing the guardrails for our communication.

# HOW TO COMMUNICATE BOUNDARIES:



**Sometimes we hesitate in setting boundaries because we aren't confident our own ability to communicate our needs, preferences, and values.**

The way we communicate in setting boundaries is important. If we aren't clear and assertive, then we tend towards being either passive or passive aggressive.

**Passive** - We are unclear and hesitant in our communication. This leaves the person we are talking with unclear about what we need or want.

**Passive-Aggressive** - We use sarcasm or disdain to communicate. This harms relationships because it disrupts trust and safety.

**Assertive** - We are confident that it is normal to have and express needs in relationships. We clearly communicate what we can offer and what we will accept. This acknowledges the fact that we all have limitations, that we expect to be treated with kindness, and that we are willing to be compassionate and loving.

We cannot expect other people to be mind readers. Assertively communicating is not unkind; it sets people up for success.

The book *Boundaries* by Drs. Cloud and Townsend emphasizes the value of communicating our needs and preferences in the way we are treated through boundaries, "We have our own thoughts, and if we want others to know them, we must tell them."

There is a famous Maya Angelou quote that says, "You are only free when you realize that you belong no place - you belong every place - no place at all. The price is high. The reward is great." While I believe that we belong to Jesus, the point of this quote is not lost on me. When we try to fit in and adapt to those around us, we lose who we are.

**When we are willing to take the risk, set boundaries - hold to our convictions and maintain safety - then we experience the reward of rich, meaningful relationships where we are free to be ourselves.**

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