

BOUNDARIES AND CODEPENDENCY

Why Should We Have Boundaries?

Personal boundaries are **limits** we set and maintain in life and relationships. These limits are established by us **for our own good**. Our boundaries define and protect who we are, what we value, and what we are responsible for, i.e., where we end and where others begin. So, limits keep us safe, and we always have the right and obligation to ensure our own well-being.

With healthy personal boundaries, we can enjoy relationships characterized by respect and fair treatment. However, if our limits are not both announced and enforced, we are vulnerable and may be used or abused by those who do not honor our personal boundaries. In all dysfunctional relationships, there are some who lack boundaries and others who lack respect for boundaries. And those who find themselves stuck in codependent relationship patterns may lack both personal boundaries and respect for other's boundaries. Their family of origin modeled this.

A good analogy for a boundary is a fence around your property and house. A fence protects what is important to you. It delineates what you're responsible for. And, it limits others from encroaching on your personal space. If you've ever lived in a house with no fence around the property, you already know the difficulties you can have with careless neighbors, stray animals, ownership disputes, and anyone who might take advantage of your family and what you own.

Why Don't We Set Limits?

As Christians, we can get confused about the goodness of boundaries. The Bible does teach us to care for and help others. Galatians 6:2 states, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." God expects us to help those who are truly overburdened (widows, orphans, the poor and disabled). But the Bible doesn't teach us to be enslaved to every felt need of others. After all, they are obligated, as are we, to take care of their own day-to-day responsibilities in life. Galatians 6:5 states, "For each will have to bear his own load." So, it's not hard to see why we get confused. But, if we're honest, we will admit that our own false beliefs and fear-based feelings are what create the confusion many of us encounter with boundaries. For example:

- I need to fix others because it's the primary way I feel good about myself
- I have to rescue others because it's not right to allow people I love to suffer
- I must control others' behavior or I'll end up sharing their consequences
- I feel guilty if I'm not a "good Christian", a "good mother", a "good spouse", etc.

Can you imagine Jesus helping others for those reasons? No, he helped others because he was doing his Father's work for his Father's glory. He wasn't driven by false beliefs or fear-based feelings. He set a great example for us by setting limits and by prioritizing personal self-care. He willingly met the needs of those who were hungry, sick, and possessed, but he set limits with people so he could take care of his own needs. Jesus didn't help everyone and he didn't help all the time. What if he had done that? In the Gospels, we clearly see Jesus getting away from others to take care of his own needs. He did not allow anyone to use him for their own selfish agendas. Jesus stood up for himself when no one else would.

Boundaries Are A Must!

Setting and maintaining personal boundaries is one antidote for codependency. Jesus had limits, and he never felt guilty about enforcing them. If we're going to be a healthy person and have healthy relationships, we must have our own limits. Without doing so, we lose self-respect, the respect of others, and even our own identity. And what good are we if we help the world and lose our God-given identity? See the last article to develop and cherish your personal identity.