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Goodbye Anxiety

**Choosing Relationships that
Produce Peace**

Maintaining Healthy Boundaries



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How to Choose Relationships that Produce Peace

(Adapted from a sermon by Sam Williams, Bay Marin Community Church, 1997)

People who produce peace in your life are...

VRP = Very Resourceful People

People who renew you, teach you, and draw out the best in you. These are parents, teachers, and mentors.

Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm. – Proverbs 13:20

VIP = Very Important People

People that share your interests and passions and encourage you in them. These are your mutual friendships, co-workers.

VTP = Very Trainable People

People who want to learn from you, are teachable, and who can learn to do the things that you do. These are people that you mentor and draw out the best in.

People above this line add meaning and value to your life. You must seek them out.

People below this line do not add anything to your life. These people will seek you out.

People who produce anxiety and stress are...

VNP = Very Nice People

People who like you, tell you how good you are, and are positive about you. However, they don't really add value to your life and you don't add value to theirs. They like being around you, always like to get together, and will fill your schedule if you let them – reducing the time you have for people who do add value, and add to time stress. If you don't get the wrong people out of your life you won't have time for the right people.

VDP = Very Draining People (Peace Stealers)

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." - 1 Corinthians 15:33

People who are always calling you with their crisis. They try to make you feel responsible for solving their problems or making them happy. They may make their needs seem urgent and or make you feel guilty when you don't help them. They don't really want to change. They just enjoy getting your attention. Since their needs are endless and you have a limited supply of emotional energy, you need to set limited hours of operation with these people. They are the reason that God created voicemail.

"If people need you more than they feed you then your life is out of balance." - Joel Osteen

Maintaining Healthy Boundaries: How to Care Without Feeling Responsible for Everything

“You are not responsible for other people's happiness. If you try to make everyone around you happy, the one person that won't be happy is you.” – Joel Osteen

From “What Does a Healthy Boundary Look Like?” – *Boundaries* Chapter 2, Cloud and Townsend:

What are personal “boundaries” and how do they work?

- **A “boundary” defines what is me and what is not me.** Knowing what I am responsible for increases my peace and freedom.
- **Poorly defined boundaries can lead to stress and anxiety.** Think of how confusing and anxiety-producing it would be to be responsible for taking care of a property but not know what the boundaries of the property were. This is exactly what happens to us spiritually and emotionally when we have a poor sense of boundaries.

Poor personal boundaries can feel like having a sprinkler system that waters your neighbor's yard. You keep turning on the sprinklers responsibly while your neighbor does nothing. Your grass is brown and dying – but your neighbor looks at his green lawn and thinks “my yard is doing fine.”

- **We are responsible to others and for ourselves.** Galatians 6 explains our responsibility to one another:

Galatians 6:2 tells us to “carry each others' burdens.” In Greek, the word for *burden* means “excess burdens” that are too heavy, like boulders, to carry them on our own.

Galatians 6:5 says that “each one should carry his own load.” The Greek word for *load* means “cargo” or “the burden of daily toil.” These loads are like knapsacks that we should be able to carry on our own and take responsibility for.

Example: Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. The good Samaritan took care of the traveler's emergency. He did not take responsibility for the traveler on an ongoing basis.

- **The purpose of a boundary is to keep the good in and the bad out.** A healthy boundary is like a fence with a gate that can open and shut to regulate what comes in and out. For example:

Sin goes out through confession to God and others (1 John 1:9, James 5:16). Boundaries can also keep out pain caused by hurtful people.

God's truth (Rev. 3:20, John 1:12) and good things from other people (2 Cor. 6:11-13) come in.

- **An unhealthy boundary is like a wall that keeps the bad in and the good out.** An example is the case of an abused person who keeps all the anger and pain inside by not expressing it to anyone – and walls out love for fear of getting hurt even more.

10 Ways to Set Healthy Boundaries

Remember if someone gets upset when you set a healthy boundary, they are not really your friend. They are just trying to manipulate you.

1) Just say no. The most basic boundary-setting word is “no.” This lets other people know that you exist apart from them and you are in control of you. Being clear about your no – and your yes – is a theme that runs throughout the Bible (Matt. 5:37; James 5:12).

The Bible warns us against giving to others “reluctantly or under compulsion” (2 Cor. 9:7). People with poor boundaries struggle with saying no to the control, pressure, demands, and sometimes real need of others. They feel like saying no to someone will jeopardize the relationship - so they say yes but feel resentful inside.

Sometimes a person is pressuring you to do something but other times the real pressure comes from your own sense of what you “should” do. Saying no to external and internal pressures is expressing and enjoying the spiritual fruit of self-control.

2) Limit your exposure to toxic behavior. We can't set limits on other people or make them behave right. We can set limits on our own exposure to people behaving poorly.

God sets standards, but He lets people be who they are and then separates himself from them when they misbehave. This says, “You can be that way if you choose, but you cannot come into my house.” God limits his exposure to evil and unrepentant people. So should we (Matt. 18:15-17, 1 Cor. 5:9-13). This is not being unloving.

3) Get physically distant. Proverbs 22:3 says that “the prudent man sees the evil and hides himself.” It's okay to physically remove yourself from a situation to maintain boundaries. This helps you replenish yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually after you have given past your limit – just as Jesus often did.

The Bible urges us to separate from those who continually hurt us and create a safe place for ourselves. This may also cause the other person to wake up and change their behavior (Matt. 18:17-18, 1 Cor. 5:11-13).

4) Get emotionally distant. Emotional distance is a temporary boundary to give your heart the space it needs to be safe. You should not continue to set yourself up for hurt or disappointment.

Many people are too quick to trust someone in the name of forgiveness and not make sure the other person is producing “fruit in keeping with repentance” (Luke 3:8). Forgive, but guard your heart until you see sustained change.

5) Give yourself time off from the situation. Taking time off from a person, or a project, can be a way of regaining ownership over some out-of-control aspect of your life where boundaries need to be set. (A time for embracing and a time to refrain from embracing – Ecclesiastes 3:5-6).

6) Let others experience the consequences of their behavior. It is healthy to recognize and take responsibility for the consequences of your own behavior – and not blame them on someone else. It is also healthy to let other people take responsibility for the consequences of their own behavior. To shield another person from the consequences of their behavior is to disempower them.

The law of cause and effect is a basic law of life. The Bible calls it the Law of Sowing and Reaping. You reap what you sow (Gal. 6:7-8).

When we let others reap what they sow in life we are not being mean or punishing them. We are just treating them how God treats us. Protecting people from the natural consequences of their behavior creates co-dependence.

When the Law of Sowing and Reaping is violated – the responsible person has the problem, and the irresponsible person does not have the problem.

7) Take full responsibility for your choices. We need to take responsibility for our own choices. This leads to the fruit of self-control (Gal. 5:23). A common boundary problem is disowning our choices and trying to lay the responsibility for them on someone else. When we think someone else is in control, we are not taking responsibility.

We are in control of our choices no matter how we feel. This keeps us from making choices to “give reluctantly or under compulsion” (2 Cor. 9:7). Making decisions based on others’ approval or on guilt breeds resentment, a product of our sinful nature.

8) Communicate your thoughts and feelings regularly and openly. We are responsible for sharing our thoughts with others and not holding them responsible for reading our minds. “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him?” (1 Cor. 2:11). If we want others to know what we are thinking, we must tell them.

“Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.” – Ephesians 4:26

“An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.” – Proverbs 24:26

The anxiety that comes with being honest in the moment is less than the anxiety of being honest much later.

9) Have someone hold you accountable for maintaining boundaries. Sometimes it is necessary or helpful to let other people help you set boundaries. Having other people to support you may give you the strength to say “no” to someone or something. A support person or group might meet your need for close relationships while you distance yourself from someone who is hurting you.

10) Change your beliefs about boundaries. People with boundary problems usually have distorted attitudes about responsibility. They think holding people responsible for their feelings, choices and behaviors is mean – but it’s really the best thing to do. Proverbs repeatedly says that setting limits and accepting responsibility will save lives (Prov. 13:18, 24).

(See 8 Common Boundary Myths)

8 Common Boundary Myths

From “Common Boundary Myths” – *Boundaries* Chapter 6, Cloud and Townsend:

Myth 1: Setting boundaries is being selfish.

Truth: Boundaries actually increase our ability to care for others.

There is a difference between selfishness and stewardship. Being selfish is being fixated on what you want to the exclusion of caring about others' needs. Good stewardship includes taking responsibility for getting your own needs met (Matt. 7:7, Phil 2:12) and growing in your own relationship with God.

Even Jesus walked away from people's needs sometimes:

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and be healed of their sickness. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. - Luke 5:15-16

Myth 2: Setting boundaries is disobeying God.

Truth: A lack of boundaries can be a sign of disobedience.

People with weak boundaries are often compliant on the outside but rebellious and resentful on the inside. In God's eyes an internal “no” nullifies an external “yes” – and saying yes when you really mean no is lying. We are not supposed to do things reluctantly or out of compulsion (2. Cor. 9:7).

Myth 3: Setting boundaries will lead to getting hurt by others.

Truth: Setting boundaries just reveals the real quality of your relationships.

We are supposed to tell the truth, even if people attack us or withdraw from us. Ultimately we can't control others or manipulate them into doing what we want. When Jesus told the rich young man how to inherit eternal life, the man withdrew and went away (Matt. 19:22). Jesus said “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets. (Luke 6:26). If everyone agrees with everything you say, you probably are not being honest.

Myth 4: Setting boundaries is hurting others.

Truth: Boundaries are not an *offensive* weapon, they are a *defensive* tool.

Boundaries do not attack, control, or hurt anyone. Boundaries simply prevent other people from taking things from you at the wrong times. Boundaries allow others to carry their own knapsacks (Gal. 6:5) – and keep you from interrupting the law of sowing and reaping in others' lives (Gal. 6:7-8). Each person has the responsibility to develop a group of supportive relationships to have more than one person to go to in a time of need.

Myth 5: Setting boundaries means you are angry.

Truth: Boundaries actually decrease anger.

Anger comes from having your boundaries violated. Many people feel anger when they first begin to set boundaries – but this anger is old anger – from having boundaries violated in the past. Boundary-injured people who start taking control of their lives are often like the “slave who becomes king” and causes the earth to shake (due to anger – Proverbs 30:22). This rage has built up over time, when boundaries were not in place, and the person felt out of control and resentful.

Myth 6: Other people’s boundaries are hurtful.

Truth: When boundaries are hurtful – something else is wrong....

Boundaries feel cold and rejecting when; 1) inappropriate boundaries were set on you in childhood by uncaring parents, 2) you are in an idolatrous relationship and are depending too much on one person to meet all your needs, 3) when you are not taking responsibility for your own life. With boundaries, the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12) applies, if you want others to respect your boundaries, you have to respect theirs.

Myth 7: Setting boundaries causes feelings of guilt.

Truth: Boundaries only cause guilt when you perceive a false obligation to someone.

To avoid guilt when boundary setting, only accept the legitimate gifts of people who are truly giving – not those of people who are just giving to get or give with strings attached. Just because you receive something from someone doesn’t mean you owe something. What you owe, Biblically, is gratitude (Col. 2:7) - but gratitude and boundaries are separate and can be expressed at the same time. John expresses both in his letters to churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira in the book of Revelation. All three letters contain gratitude – and setting limits (boundaries).

Myth 8: Boundaries are permanent and will burn bridges with people.

Truth: In a healthy relationship, setting limits is your choice and you can always change the boundary later.

There are Biblical precedents for this. God chose not to destroy Ninevah when the people repented (Jonah 3:10), Paul refused to take John Mark on a mission trip (Acts 15:37-39) and took him on a later mission trip when circumstances were different (2 Tim. 4:11). You own your boundaries – they don’t own you.