

# Relationship Boundaries—don't be Afraid of Them!

By B. D. Tate

## INTRODUCTION

Without boundaries we are lost in a sea of worldly ideas, on a boat with no compass to guide or provide direction. **Broken boundaries lead to brokenness, injury, and disillusionment.** Because we are weak, lacking love to control our passions, lacking love to control our judgment, we need boundaries. Relationships need structure, stability, trust, faithfulness, in order to grow in depth. Boundaries provide the “fencing” to keep us inside and protected. Marriage is God’s ultimate relationship boundary, fencing in love and trust. God has established Biblical boundaries for all relationships to keep us safe, to maintain the good, and bring personal fulfillment.

## PRELIMINARY

I am amazed at the lack of understanding that is exhibited by many people today. I know that our culture (and the enemy of our souls) is doing a good job of misinforming, misdirecting, and providing alternative values in human relationships. No one wants to be set up for failure; yet that is exactly what is happening when we break down the boundaries and proceed ahead.

Sometimes we are blindly deciding to act in relationships. We think we are being wise by operating according to our own best interests. Sometimes we give into our desires because we don't see the end result or harm--we hurt ourselves and others. We may cross boundaries in ignorance, or willful defiance, in either case the destructive processes do their harm. Aware or not, understood or not, boundaries are given for our safe keeping. They are inspired by the creator who knows us better than we know ourselves. They are given for our benefit, happiness, and well being.

## BOUNDARIES

We speak about freedoms, liberties, and pursuing happiness to our heart's content. As if freedom itself was the purpose of life. The ironic thing is this freedom without borders leads to chaos. There was a nursery school situation that had very little space for the kids to play. They had a small fenced play yard that they decided to open up. They tore down the fence which meant the kids could play far and wide. What surprised them is that the kids huddled around the swing set. They didn't explore or roam beyond the original fence. They decided to put the fence back up. The kids responded by running and playing happily again. They were secure with the boundaries and trusted their environment again.

**Boundaries establish trust and security!** They provide the tangible evidence of trustworthiness. Trust is an absolute value when it comes to marriage or any fruitful relationship. Here's the problem: the world would tear away boundaries and call it freedom; but there can be no trust without them. This is an enigma for some. They want to claim that trust means you can tear down the fencing and allow any kind of behavior; but this is not possible with sinful people. Trust must be earned, shown, proven, it is not a given. Love is given, but trust manifests itself in practice. When nothing is required trust can't be earned, measured, or understood. “Oh, I trust you, do whatever you want.” That

is an ignorant statement, possibly confusing love with trust. Marriage for example is not an open play ground. God didn't create it without fencing. He created it to be maintained, guarded and nurtured. The more partners remain within the fence, the more they keep the boundaries, the more trust is built. The more trust is created in marriage, the more security and opportunity for love to grow.

Marriage maintenance is commanded by God but is exercised by **self control**. No marriage is to be a situation where one mate controls or dominates the other. There is to be mutual respect, collaboration, consideration, and agreement, all of which works best within boundaries.

Self control means each partner is motivated by their love for the other to keep the marriage boundaries. The more each practices these protections, the more security and paradoxically the more freedom, the marriage has. The freedom is found through trust that allows each to be his/her self. There must be trust so we can be real, open, honest; so we can express fears, concerns, disappointments, etc.

### **BOUNDARIES, WHAT ARE THEY?**

First, we must understand that the human condition, sin nature, requires discipline. We must restrain our selfishness, our lusts, and resist temptations to cross over boundaries. The Bible clearly teaches us not trust in our own heart or lean on our own understanding but obey (Prov. 3). Our natural tendency is to think or do what we think is best. We have personal pride that views our opinion as right or superior. God's word teaches us that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17). We are very good at self justification, manipulation of the facts, and rationalization. Therefore we must realize that God's boundaries will not likely be ours. God rules will not be our rules; yet, Jesus is Lord.

### **BOUNDARIES WITHIN MARRIAGE**

God's plan: The Word of God says that marriage is two becoming one, one man and one woman. It's about two being subject to each other, committed for life.

God's boundaries are established so that the two can become one, and remain one. The world would break down and apart the marriage relationship with it's anything goes pronouncements and practices.

God's countermeasures against the world and our sin nature are the following principles from which guidelines are established.

- 1) **Do not provide the opportunity for the flesh.** Do not make provision for our sinful nature to win the day. Don't give opportunity for the devil to deceive, to confuse, or get a foot in the door (Rom. 13:14).
- 2) **We are to be beyond reproach.** We are to keep a good reputation among God and man. We are to be righteous and appear to be righteous in all circumstances (I Tim. 3:7).
- 3) **We are to avoid the very appearance of evil.** We are to avoid bad situations and circumstances that lead others to think something evil is going on (I Thes. 5:22).

Today, TV breaks down every moral boundary between men and women; everything is okay and acceptable. Without boundaries to restrict and restrain the

sinful nature within us, we'll not be able to withstand the onslaught of temptation and we will fall. Jesus said, "*Whoever commits sin, is a slave to sin.*" Sin gets a hold of us, not the other way around. Therefore we must place boundaries between us and sin so that we can live protected, safe, and secure lives. Trust is built when we follow those protections, it shows we understand the problem and wish to keep far from it.

**For example:** If one is an alcoholic, a reasonable boundary would be to stay out of bars, away from parties that serve alcohol, and keep alcoholic beverages out of your home. This puts a boundary between the alcoholic and alcohol.

**Another example:** The Bible clearly teaches us to keep our clothes on (Lev. 18). Jesus said if any man looks upon a woman to lust after her in his heart, he has committed adultery. For men to gaze or consume pornography is to violate a God ordained boundary due to the fall and sin condition. We cannot handle looking and not lusting. Women who dress sensual will be held accountable to God.

A side issue along these lines for women and clothing: If a woman would not want a strange man to touch any part of her exposed body, then cover it up. Some women expose too much and men gawk to see more.

When boundaries like these are broken down, **lines of self control are difficult to maintain.** This would mean that things are going on inside that should not be going on. In a marriage, if the husband is looking at porn, or another woman dressed inappropriately, likely his wife would not like it. This breaks down trust.

**Other examples of boundaries being broken:**

-When a single young girl goes into the bedroom of a young boy to do homework, being left alone, they are providing for the flesh.

-When a married man takes out a co-worker of eligible age for a work related purpose, dining alone, they are opening up problems.

-When young people in college are allowed to live co-ed in a dormitory or a rented house, this is a violation and providing for the flesh.

These types of situations are providing temptation. They provide for the potentials, entertaining possibilities, giving opportunity for inappropriate behavior.

We are sinful human beings who need a savior. **If we could control ourselves we wouldn't need one.** We wouldn't need clothing, marriage rings, laws, or the blood of Christ. WE are out of control. It is by God's commands that we have any restraints at all. When God's word is not obeyed all kinds of breakdowns occur. All of which are negative, destructive, stealing away what love and security would provide—trust.

## **KEEP IN MIND**

Marriage is the foundational relationship that God has established for all societies. Marriage and family came first in creation; therefore it is primary over work and career—although many don't see it that way.

Therefore, the marriage boundaries come first. The relationship between a husband and wife comes **before parents**. A man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife. We are to maintain, protect, and guard our marriage against all others including our children. The love of children as strong as it can be doesn't supersede the love between a husband and wife.

It is vital not to make the mistake of marrying the wrong person. The wrong person would be someone who doesn't put the marriage first; someone who claims to love you but doesn't show it. We should look for someone we can't live without; not someone we can live with—there is a big difference. It's about finding our soul mate which as a Christian, **we will not find outside of the faith**. II Cor. 6:14 admonishes us to not be unequally yoked together. This means a believer should not marry **or date** for that matter, an unbeliever. **This is a Godly boundary.**

Boundaries in marriage are paramount. Here is how it functions: In regards to relationships outside of the marriage, **mine are subject to hers, hers are subject to me**. This means I have no female relationships outside of my wife's approval, acceptance, or knowledge, and vice versa. This is the marriage covenant. I am hers and she is mine.

This means I don't date someone else. I don't spend time with someone else, that is another woman, and vice versa. This means I am not alone with another woman; she is not alone with another man. This means I don't flirt with another woman, or she with another man. This means I willingly subject myself to my wife's restraints and she mine.

She is the love of my life, I want her to be happy, and I want her to trust my love, so I show she can trust me because I subject myself to her needs. This trust is not based upon my ability, strength, wisdom, or agenda, but God's grace through his fencing. If I am creating situations that appear evil, provide temptation, or break down the boundaries, I have made a choice. If I turn it around on her and claim she doesn't trust me, that in itself is a deceptive lie. I can't violate God's limits and claim I'm trustworthy. There have been many good intentioned, innocently motivated violations that have led to hurt, pain, suffering, and destroyed trust. As I keep the boundaries and she does too, trust is rooted deep; each choice to stay in the fence confirms our love. We are building, creating, and protecting trust by God's command. **Trust needs requirements and shows it is faithful through keeping them.**

I am not to go out looking for or at another woman. I am not to go where I can become involved with one. I am not to practice being alone with another woman at work, in ministry, or anywhere else for that matter. These are God's rules...I want to keep them, and my marriage is blessed, safe, secure, and fulfilled because of OUR obedience to them.

Married people are not to hang around with the opposite sex at any time. Why? Because the temptation is being provided for...If we have to entertain a woman for business, do so with a group, a chaperone, with your wife, but not alone!

We are not to establish friends with another couple's mate. Spending time with the other's spouse is a violation of covenant. Neither are we to spend time with our spouse's best friend. These situations are recipes for disaster. **Our best friend, or any friend, is another man for the husband; another woman for the wife.**

We are not able to overcome sin or resist temptation on our own. We need the Holy Spirit; we need to obey God's protections. We are setting ourselves up for failure when we provide for sin's pleasures.

### **NOT MARRIED?**

Young people who are not married should not be going places alone, staying alone with a man. **There is no righteous reason for an unmarried man to be alone with a woman, or vice versa.** You want to be alone to talk? Do it in a safe way. Don't be alone in the house, apartment, dormitory, etc. avoid the appearance and provision of evil; go to a public place like a restaurant to talk privately.

Why do ministers fall into sexual sin?

Why do married men run off with another woman?

Why do unmarried women get pregnant?

**Choices and decisions were made to provide for it.** The boundaries were violated. People get hurt, safety is ruined, trust destroyed, and relationships fail. Marriage must be guarded. Have no relationships with other women except with your wife.

**The Lord's Prayer** "...lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil." We are leading ourselves into temptation when boundaries are violated. We are committing evil by practicing things we wouldn't want our spouse to practice. These boundaries are common sense to any spiritually minded person. We will be tempted to break them, but don't, stay within the fence, under control, don't give our flesh the opportunity to carry us away. Many have suffered greatly because they allowed themselves to seek sinful passions and pleasures that ruined their marriage. Don't be another statistic, be smart, obey God and stay within the boundaries. Amen.