

## Healthy Boundaries

*For you have been called to live in freedom -- not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "love your neighbor as yourself. (Galatians 5)*

Two aspects of limits is *setting limits on others* and *setting our internal limits*. We often focus more on the first and use it to excuse not doing our part to live healthy limits within ourselves. They both are equally important for a healthy and happy life.

**Limits on Others:** We cannot actually set limits on others but what we can do is set limits on our own exposure to people who are behaving poorly. We can't change them or make them behave right. We need to let people be who they are and then separate ourselves from them when they misbehave. We help everyone when we separate ourselves from those who act in destructive ways. We are not being unloving. Separating ourselves protects love, because we are taking a stand against things that destroy love.

How do we set limits and separate ourselves in a healthy way? We can walk away. We can choose to not continue a conversation or simply change the direction of the conversation. We can name behaviours we need in order to be with someone so they know what to expect. We need to make the choice for how we think as well as for how we act. We need to let go of any inner resentments and irritations. We need to not gossip or talk and talk about the other person and their behaviour. We can simply live and let live. Sometimes a deliberate choice to forgive and move on is key to actually not letting the other person's behaviour continue to be a focus and irritant in our life.

**Internal Limits:** We need to have spaces inside ourselves where we can have a feeling, an impulse, or a desire, without acting it out. We need self-control without repression. We need to be able to say no to ourselves. This includes both our destructive desires and some good ones that are not wise to pursue at a given time. Internal structure is a very important component of boundaries and identity, as well as ownership, responsibility, and self-control.

Jesus walked on this earth with people who often didn't agree with him, weren't loyal to Him, and were just trying to figure out what to do with Him. As we begin to get to know God and walk with Him, we experience some of these same conflicts between our thinking and behaving and God's way of thinking and behaving. We may wonder about what the Bible teaches and why God limits our behaviour in certain ways? However, God is the one who created us and knows how life works. Our first priority is to live for God first - not our own desires and not for the expectations of others. Too often it's one of those two motivators that's behind what we are thinking, feeling or acting. God speaks to both of these areas and describes the consequences of having no limits with others or having no limits on our own desires.

*Live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict. But when you are directed by the Holy Spirit you are free.*

God has a new and better way of life for us which, surprisingly, is found in living with limits. We learn to wait for something or to live with a healthy alternative rather than exposing ourselves to sin and destruction by gratifying our momentary desires. We choose to say no to a thought when it leads us to anger and resentment. We choose to say yes to those behaviours that bring love and joy and peace. God knows best. Any momentary limits to our thinking and behaviour open many more doors to goodness than what they seem to close to temporary pleasure.

How am I following God in a new healthy life by living in the freedom of limits?

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which of these two are easier or harder for me, setting limits with others or dealing with my own desires?
2. Who do I have in my life to help me sort priorities on an ongoing basis?
3. What structures do I build into my life to help me set new habits?
4. Do I choose to accept God's standards for limit-setting in each of the areas listed?