

Believing in Boundaries

Using biblical teaching to understand
and establish healthy modern
boundaries.

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Believing in Boundaries

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Dedication

Serenity Small Group

This book is dedicated to all the ladies in my Serenity group who loved on me in my sickness of codependency—especially Synthia Morgan, who dedicated her time and energy and patience and strength for all the rest of us who needed it. I absolutely would not have had the knowledge and ability to write this book without their kick start of love and support through some really dark days.

All the Relationships

I'd also like to dedicate this book to everyone who taught me that I needed strong boundaries in my life. And to all the good, bad, and difficult relationships that eventually led to setting stronger boundaries in my life.

My Mom

She is always a supporter of my wild and crazy dreams.

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My Brother

No one sees you as genuinely raw and honest as a sibling! Without him, I don't know that this project of love would have fully manifested. I appreciate the time and energy he put into helping me refine it. He is a cheerleader that inspires me to always learn and grow!

Disclaimer

I have a hyper awareness of abusive and extremely unhealthy and damaging relationships. Often people don't address these situations when they are talking about relationship issues. So before we journey into boundaries and how, I believe, God wants us to apply them, I want to address highly abusive relationships.

While this book is applicable to any relationship, based on the danger of the relationship, be it sexual, physical, or extreme verbal abuse, you may need to get help to implement these techniques into your life. Please look into local support groups. Al-anon is a great place to start, and they should have one close to or in your area. The website is listed below.

Extremely dangerous and abusive relationships do not qualify for regular relational advice or relationship practices. There is a level of safety that cannot possibly be addressed in general terms or practices. But you can access the help available. Please get help before you implement any boundaries in the relationship.

If you are in a relationship with a narcissist, boundaries will be the only thing that can bring any sort of sanity to the relationship. Please be sure to get support for narcissistic abuse recovery. Some narcissists can become dangerous when they feel like they are

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losing control over a situation. Please be aware and get a game plan in place before you begin to shift the relationship to make it safer and healthier for you.

You are not obligated to “work out” a relationship that is dangerous or soul sucking. I highly recommend you make a quiet game plan, with trusted people, to get away from this kind of relationship. Then if you have to have contact with this person again, your boundaries will protect you.

If you are in an abusive relationship or dangerous situation, please get help!!

The National Domestic Violence Hotline is 1-800-799-SAFE(7233).

This book is not a “how to” book on boundaries. Boundaries are as varied as the people and circumstances that you are dealing with, and I would have a difficult time covering the vastness of boundaries. I want you to understand that boundaries are important and biblical and that God is the establisher of boundaries. Understanding boundaries applied to relationships, modern cultural issues, and church culture/faith practices are my goal in sharing this book with you. I highly recommend that you find a support group to help you with your own personal journey in setting boundaries to fit your needs. Please feel free to join our online community helping to support each other. You can find the information on my website: www.believingboundaries.com

Al-Anon’s website is: <https://al-anon.org>

Introduction

Boundaries have been the quest of my entire adult life. I believe God called me to write this book to share my journey and encourage you, too. I struggled to navigate rocky waters without sinking because I didn't know where the rocks were and my vision was cloudy. I have spent most of my adult life shipwrecked on ridiculous rocks that could have been avoided had I just noticed the rocks to start with. It also would have helped if I had listened to the prompting in my heart that God gave me. However, I decided not to listen to the ultimate Captain of my Heartship. I actually tied up the Captain, with mutiny in my heart, and took over completely and tried to navigate all on my own. When he was talking, I duct taped his mouth and proceeded without much caution. Obviously, God is the Captain I am referring to and the ship is an analogy for my life and, ultimately, my heart.

My ship's first major rock was a broken marriage. We got married in November 1999, even though God told me not to marry him. God could see the disaster that lay ahead. But I duct taped his mouth because clearly I had this! I didn't. There was no amount of my love that was going to heal or help the brokenness in that marriage. I became a domestic violence abuse survivor. He

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remained a raging alcoholic. Luckily, God graciously gave me a lighthouse in the form of my firstborn son to lead me back to His direction. My son was a light in a very dark place. Two broken people do not make a whole person in a marriage. It would take me another 15 years before I learned that lesson. We divorced in August of 2003, after being separated for nearly two years.

While that was a major rock, I had many little rocks that caused dents in my heart along the way. Friendships that were unhealthy that I just couldn't walk away from. Work situations that I was too young to realize weren't OK. I was in my early 20s and truly had never heard of boundaries and didn't know that it was even a thing I should be concerned about. I was taught right and wrong, but not how sometimes wrong things (lying, deceitfulness, indifference) cross into what seem like right things (friendships, work relationships, intimate relationships). These are the rocky waters.

I was called into my second marriage to my late husband, Jay. We married in June of 2004. We were both fervently living for God, and the Captain was definitely manning the Heartship. I think we got married in calm waters, but we immediately tied up and duct taped the Captain and traveled directly into some major storms. I say I think it was calm waters, because looking back on that time in my life, I am not sure much was calm. It was a beautiful collision of two beat-up ships handcrafted into one ship. God took the broken pieces of each of our ships and put them together to make us stay afloat. Remember that I said two broken people don't make a whole person? It applies here too. Our Craftsman was repairing us individually, but He had to start with the broken parts that were there to work with. So off we went with a tied up and duct taped Captain into a night that would last years. Within a

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month of our marriage, I was pregnant with our baby girl. I had a lot of trauma from my first marriage, especially with pregnancy because of physical abuse while pregnant, and I was completely freaked out and terrified to be in that situation again. Pregnant by a man, vulnerable to a man. I still knew absolutely nothing about boundaries and how they applied to life. We became involved in a church at that time that had a recovery ministry. I started attending the Serenity groups every Wednesday night. Serenity is a Christian small group at the church I attended at the time that is based on the Twelve-step program used for recovery from addiction and codependency. This group became a lifeline for me, and for the first time ever, I realized my part of the addiction cycle of sickness, and it included a serious lack of boundaries.

In 2006, Jay relapsed on drugs. He used drugs for that entire year until he went to rehab in November. The Serenity group helped me set my boundaries. I didn't have to accept his terms or his use because it was dangerous and unhealthy for our entire family. This boundary seems obvious, right? But nothing is clear when you are living in the chaos. The chaos clouds the line of healthy and unhealthy boundaries in relationships. I absolutely hated his guts, and I was angry at God for calling me into a ridiculous marriage. I felt like God had thrown me into the rocks this time. Why?! Why did he throw me into the rocks when I had fought so long and hard to get off the previous rocks on which I had been shipwrecked? How could he do this to me?

I got pregnant with my third baby, a boy, while Jay was in rehab. My son was prophesied, so I knew he was coming. I was still surprised by the timing, though I have come to learn that God's timing looks absolutely nothing like perfect timing. Home Jay came. I don't know that either of us really knew what to do with

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this situation. I was exhausted. I had set some hard boundaries that were definitely beneficial for us, and it helped Jay from ever revisiting his habit. Jay and I had two more children, for a total of four kids together. He raised my firstborn like he was his own. I think God kept giving us children because He knew we needed more than a sheet of paper (i.e., a marriage license) to keep this crazy train together. We both still had so much brokenness that we continued for many years, nearly a decade, with some painful situations. But going through those situations is what God used to give me a passion for boundaries, grace, and forgiveness and what, eventually, led to this book. In December 2014, Jay passed away suddenly from hypertension, an event that was especially traumatic for me.

After all that, I still have to fight my codependent tendencies in relationships. But, oh, how far I have come! I am much better at setting boundaries for my needs and not allowing others to be selfish. I have had to have some strong conversations with people who think my boundaries are “harsh” and question why can’t I give a little. The reason is “giving a little” only has a place in a healthy relationship, not an unhealthy one. In a healthy relationship, there is give on both sides and a recognition of needs on both sides. But in an unhealthy one if you choose to give a little, you have to be willing to absorb all the consequences that come with the give. I am no longer willing to absorb those consequences to the demise of my own heart and needs. My journey will never end because my prone is to “give a little” a bit too often and a bit too much.

Part one:

Understanding boundaries

Chapter 1

Becoming a Believer

The boundary principles that you will learn throughout this book are valid and useful for anyone and everyone, believer in Christ and non-believer. However, with the power of the Holy Spirit inside to help teach, lead, guide, and open your eyes to needs, your path will be more illuminated and you will have the strength needed to carry out your plan and create healthy boundaries for yourself. God allowed Jesus to come to Earth to create the ability for the Holy Spirit to live inside of us. Prior to Christ's death and resurrection, humans didn't have the same direct connection to God. We had to either make sacrifices ourselves or visit a place called The Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:33), both of which constituted major boundaries between God and mankind. The Holy of Holies was inside the temple, where the presence of God dwelt with His people until Christ came along. The Holy of Holies had a veil around it. See, it was such a dense presence of God that you would die if you entered without first being consecrated unto God (Exodus 33:20), and only the high priest dared to enter in. He wore a rope tied around his waist so if God found him to be unclean and killed him, the "commoners" could extract him

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without subjecting themselves to the power found in the inner sanctum. When Christ died on the cross, the veil in the temple ripped from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). This wasn't like a tiny curtain that was see-through. This veil was at least three feet thick and made by excellent craftsmen with the finest of fabrics. The power of the redemption of the cross ripped that veil wide open for you, me, and all those who call on the name of Jesus so we may enter into The Holy of Holies with our Father (Luke 23:45). God is a big fan of boundaries. He knows that we are safe with boundaries. When he removed the boundary of the veil between us, He replaced it with the powerful cleansing blood of Jesus Christ (a sacrificial boundary) that offers us the ultimate freedom through forgiveness of our sins.

Christ did the work that we can never do for ourselves. He took all the ugly that we will ever do and cleaned it away through his sacrifice so we could have life to the fullest (John 10:10). Christ didn't come just to redeem us. He came to get the keys to Death and Hades (Revelation 1:18) so those spiritual principles no longer had power or control over us, his brothers and sisters.

The work of Christ having victory over Death and Hades is such an important thing because as we set boundaries with our loved ones, sometimes we will have to accept that they may die in their behavior. This acceptance is one of *the hardest* to face on the boundary journey, yet so critical for freedom for your heart and for the person whom you are "trying to save." You, my sweet friend, do not have the power to save anyone. God does. Sometimes, he needs you to get out of his way so he can do that very thing. It is still up to the person whether to choose to get help and be saved or not. I had to learn to accept this with my late husband, Jay, who had a longtime love affair with drugs prior to meeting me. I had to be

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OK if he died of his addiction during his relapse in the beginning of our marriage. I had to allow him to make the decision whether he wanted to get help and live or whether he was going to die in his addiction. As I got healthier and quit trying to control him, rescue him, and make everything OK, he had to face himself. During that time, I had to set firm boundaries with him. He was no longer able to see our children, come to our house, or have anything to do with us outside of visitation at a public place. It was when he realized I wasn't going to bend that he began to realize his need for help. Praise the Lord that he chose to go to rehab. He chose. He made the effort. He finally was able to conquer his addiction tendencies that he struggled with his whole life. Thankfully, he lived through it. Though he still had struggles, the Holy Spirit gave him the strength to stay strong.

Jesus' final loving act was to leave here so our helper, the Holy Spirit, could come (John 16:7). We are spiritual beings. We have a space built inside of us that is meant to be filled with a spirit. You may have heard it referred to as the "God-shaped hole." It is absolutely designed to be filled with God, but we try to fill it with all sorts of other odd-shaped things: love, sex, money, drugs, power, material belongings, our children. When we try to satisfy ourselves with things that do not have the power or ability to fill that specifically shaped hole, we will be left wanting. They are too shallow, too small, too big or out of shape for the hole. God designed us this way because when He made us, we were made to be in perfect unison with Him. Our Creator. Our Father.

When we accept Jesus' redemption in our lives and walk through the torn veil, I mean in a spiritual sense, not an actual physical act, we immediately get our God-shaped hole filled with the Holy Spirit, the power player of the Trinity. The Trinity is God the

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Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes and abides in us, we have the power to do so much that we can't do on our own. One thing we have the power to do with the aid of the Spirit is set healthy boundaries. We are able to rest in the love of God and understand that God has boundaries and that he will do work on our behalf, but we just have to trust him. We must lay ourselves down and release ourselves from trying to be God to someone else. We cannot fill their God-shaped hole either. We damage ourselves and them when we try.

If you haven't accepted Jesus Christ, please say this prayer with me and begin today a new walk with God and to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Lord God,

Thank you for allowing your Son, Jesus, to come and be my propitiation to You. I believe that Jesus has completed my salvation through his sacrifice on the cross. I believe you rose from death as conqueror of Death and Hades. I have sinned, and now I fully turn away from my former behaviors and will follow you with my life. I accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior of my life.

In Jesus' name,

Amen