

“Weed ‘Em and Reap”

Galatians 6:7-10

Series: Boundaries Week 3. The Ten Laws of Boundaries

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We learn a lot from our parents. Most lessons are pure gold. They form the solid bedrock on which to build a happy and healthy life. But to be honest, some things we learned at our parents’ knees are ... silly. Here is a list of ten truths that came from someone’s parental units.

1. My parents taught me about **Weather** – “Your room looks like a tornado went through it.”
2. My parents taught me about **Medical Science** – “If you don’t stop crossing your eyes, they’re going to freeze that way.”
3. My parents taught me about the **Science of Osmosis** – “Shut your mouth and eat your supper.”
4. My parents taught me to be a **Contortionist** – “Will you look at that dirt on the back of your neck.”
5. My parents taught me about **Religion** – “You better pray that this will come out of the carpet.”
6. My parents taught me about **Logic** – “When that lawn mower cuts off your toes, don’t come running to me.”
7. My parents taught me about **Genetics** – “You’re just like your father/mother.”
8. My parents taught me about my **Roots** – “Shut that door behind you. You weren’t born in a barn you know.”
9. My parents taught me about the **Circle of Life** – “I brought you into this world, and I can take you out.”
10. And my parents taught me about **Justice** – “I hope you have kids that turn out just like you!”

In this message series we are discovering the importance of healthy biblical boundaries in our relationships. The first week we learned that boundaries are like property lines in my relationships. They show me where I begin and end, what my responsibility is and what it is not. Last week we examined how boundaries are developed from an infant bonding with his or her mother to the process of separation in which a child develops an identity and personal boundaries. So it should be obvious that our first lessons in boundaries come from our parents. Some of the ten lessons I just shared are attempts – usually bad attempts – to establish or enforce a boundary. Our parents are not perfect and neither are we. Some parents do a great job of teaching their

children to have healthy boundaries while other parents need boundaries themselves. In fact, in some of these cases, the children wind up teaching the parents about boundaries.

Regardless of your situation, there is hope. You can start building better boundaries today using what Cloud and Townsend call “The Ten Laws of Boundaries.” You will find an insert which gives the biblical basis and a brief summary for each of the Ten Laws. So, yes, this will be a ten point sermon. Brace yourselves. To make it up to you, I promise that next week’s sermon will be pointless. (Actually, I shouldn’t say that since Gloria is preaching next week). I’ll move through these quickly so you may want to check these out in the book or join a Growth Group which is studying *Boundaries*.

Before we dive into these Ten Laws, however, I want to address a question which this series has raised. If boundaries are biblical and, as Christians, we live by grace not law, why do we need Ten Laws for our relationships? That’s an excellent question. As followers of Jesus, we believe we are saved not by following laws or performing enough good works, but purely by His grace – the gift of salvation Jesus won for us on the Cross. This grace, not our good works, brings us into a relationship with God. A term frequently used in the New Testament is “adopted” (Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5). When a child is adopted into a new family, he or she may come with habits, hurts or hang-ups from the past. Gradually, over time, these lessen as the child learns how to live according to the values, priorities, practices, and the love of the new family. We are adopted into God’s family by God’s love and grace not our merits. Now that we are in His family, we learn to live according to the values, priorities, practices, and love of Jesus. This is where the Ten Laws come in. We don’t follow them to get into the family or even to stay in the family. God is not going to kick us out. We follow these Laws so we can bear a strong family resemblance to our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son.

To put it another way, our life is like a garden and our old way of living – the unhealthy or non-existent boundaries from the past – are like weeds in the garden. If you pull out the dandelion at the top, the root remains and regrows. These Laws help us identify the weeds and uproot them. We want to weed ‘em and reap the benefits of healthy boundaries and relationships. So let’s grab our gardening tools and begin.

The Law of Sowing and Reaping: “I can learn from the consequences of my decisions as long as no one interrupts the cause-and-effect process.” The first law is the key to all the rest. Many problems in relationships boil down to a person who is unwilling to face the consequences of his or her actions and another person who is enabling that person to avoid the consequences. The Scriptures say:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8)

Our actions have consequences. If you smoke a couple of packs a day or overeat it will affect your health, perhaps hasten your death. If you overspend, you will be bankrupt. If you save money, you avoid financial crises. If you invest time and love in your relationships, they become closer. The authors say it’s similar to the law of gravity.

Recently, I picked up something on the table and it knocked over a crystal water pitcher...which was a wedding present. I'd like to say that the pitcher floated up into my hands. But it didn't. It obeyed the law of gravity. Crash! I suffered the consequence of what I sowed. Now what if you caught it and prevented that consequence? I'd be extremely grateful. That's fine. Yet what if I decide it's thrilling to knock more fragile wedding gifts off the table so you can catch them? You would get tired of running behind me to prevent my mad mayhem. Seems obvious right?

Yet countless relationships are just like this. One person, who is out of control, is protected from ever facing the consequence they create because another person is always catching what falls, always cleaning up after them, always co-dependent with them. This is often called "enabling." You are enabling that person to continue on a destructive or even self-destructive lifestyle. The damage is done not to wedding presents but to what comes after the wedding: the marriage and family. Work relationships are strained, stressed and severed. The Law of Sowing and Reaping means you let the person bear the pain of the consequences they create. They will never change or heal so long as you bail them out or clean up their mess. How do you apply this law? Look at the second law.

The Law of Responsibility: "I take responsibility for my life, which includes loving others." If you are entangled in a co-dependent relationship, you probably feel it is cruel and unloving to allow another to face their consequences. Of course, if someone is caught in a dangerous situation it is our responsibility to restore them. Paul writes,

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:1-2)

Notice, however, that Paul warns us to avoid being entangled in their sin. If you are assisting someone's drinking problem by buying them liquor or their spending or gambling addiction by giving them money or their workaholicism by justifying it to the family, you are caught in their sin. As the authors said a few weeks ago, you are responsible *to* people when they are in danger but responsible *for* yourself alone.

Problems arise when boundaries of responsibility are confused. We are to love one another, not be one another. I can't feel your feelings for you. I can't think for you. I can't behave for you. In short, I can't grow for you; only you can. (*Boundaries* p. 88)

Closely tied to this are two more laws. **The Laws of Respect** states "I respect others' boundaries and ask them to respect mine." This is essentially Jesus' Golden Rule: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Treat others as you would like to be treated. **The Law of Evaluation** adds: "I evaluate the effect my boundaries have on others, realizing that sometimes the hurt they cause is healing." When you shut off the pipeline of cash to the chronic spender, when you cut the flow of liquor to the alcoholic, they will start to

feel the consequences. It won't be pleasant. I promise you. They will not like it. It hurts. Yet the hurt is necessary if there is to be any chance at healing.

So what is an appropriate way to relate to a problem relationship? Let's go to **The Law of Motivation**: "I serve out of gratitude instead of fear that I will lose someone's love or ignite someone's anger." Christians are called to serve. Paul says,

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:13-14)

God gives us freedom not so we can be selfish and go wild. He sets us free to love and serve others. Yet our love and service must not be motivated by fear. I remember when my children were younger, if I disciplined one of them for doing something wrong, the other one immediately came up and said, "I love you Daddy." Why? Fear. If we do for others out of fear – the fear that they will leave us or the fear they will be angry with us – it's not love and it's not true service.

The best way to serve is one directional – to give without expecting anything in return, to bless someone and let it go. I'll bet not every Christmas gift you gave was received with joy. In fact, some may have barely made it out of the box before they were returned. Now did that bother you? Were you looking for some kind of reaction? Were you expecting some kind of response? If so, there may have been a few strings attached to the gift. Over time, that type of giving and serving will wear you down. It's better to give and serve with no strings attached, to bless and let it go.

Three more laws go along with this. **The Law of Proactivity** says, "I am assertive, expressing my needs and purpose without trampling on yours." Think of two houses with sidewalks on opposite sides of a street. Aggressiveness is me coming over and dumping my garbage on your sidewalk. Passiveness is you letting me do it. Assertiveness means when it comes to relationships, I keep my side of the street clean and I don't try to tell you what to do with yours.

The Law of Activity states, "I actively seek and knock on the door of life. Instead of failing to try, I try, fail and try again. This is how I learn." If I want a relationship to get better, I must do my part on my side of the street. Giving up, hiding or sulking will not make things better. In fact, these tactics of withdraw are really attempts to get my way. They warp all relationships just as a flat tire makes it hard to steer a car. God wants us to stay engaged and learn how to relate in a healthy way.

The Law of Envy reveals, "When I envy others, it is a sign I lack something. I turn to God for understanding and the way to find fulfillment and contentment." How many bought a ticket in the 1.5 billion dollar Powerball? Just for a minute, did you wonder how it would feel to be the winner? Were you even a bit envious? Paul wrote from prison

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:12-13)

Envy should be an early warning signal that something is wrong inside us. We see what others have and feel empty. It creates a discontent and dis-ease that drives us to act in harmful ways. Yet we can use envy to drive us to God. Paul found what so many in our community are missing: contentment no matter what the circumstances. Remember, even a billion dollars will be gone one day. You can't take it with you. Jesus gives you something better than Powerball: life that starts now and lasts forever.

The Law of Exposure reminds me "My boundaries need to be brought into God's light for healing and openly communicated to my relationships." Secrecy is a poisonous weed. It allows evil to spread and keeps people in denial. Secrecy damages relationships. Paul warns us,

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. (Ephesians 4:25-26; 5:11).

God wants us to live our relationships in His light. After I broke the crystal vase I could have hidden the fragments and said nothing. It would have been days before Lisa realized it was missing. But eventually she would. I didn't want to hide it. So the minute she walked in the door I told her what happened. What was the first thing which came out of her mouth? "That was a wedding present." Yet immediately she added, "It's okay. We can get another." Open communication builds better relationships. Secrecy kills them.

Finally, I saved the most important for last: **The Law of Power:** "When I'm powerless to stop a habit or hurt, I can submit my problems to God, ask for His power, and seek others' help." The Apostle James writes,

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:7-8,10)

We are indebted to the twelve step movement which began with Alcoholics Anonymous which, in turn, is indebted to principles derived from the Bible. To put it simply, we do not have the power to defeat many of the problems in our lives. But God does. Here's what Scripture teaches and what AA found 80 years ago: the solution is as simple as A-B-C.

Admit we are powerless over a problem which makes life unmanageable

Believe God has the power to restore us to wholeness

Commit my life to God, receive His power and work with others to recover.

Now I said it is simple. It is not easy. It will take hard work and God's power to build healthy boundaries. It may be that you are the one with the unstoppable addiction. Or, more likely, you may be a family member of someone who has no boundaries. If that's the case, your addiction is the person – trying to manage or control their out-of-control life. I and many others are here to help you Admit, Believe and Commit your situation to God so that He can lift you up.

A woman named Julie W. found she was addicted to trying to save her daughter Allison.

My daughter Allison, came home for the weekend. She opened the door, didn't speak, and dropped her duffel bag. Smudges of mascara circled her eyes. While she was upstairs taking a shower I analyzed the recent changes in her: complaints of not having any money, rarely answers the phone, weight loss, pinpoint pupils, and a "who gives a rip" persona. I searched her purse and found a leopard-colored pipe and the unmistakable odor of pot. When I confronted her about the pipe she stared at me with death-row eyes. "Chill, it's not that big of a deal."

Allison stormed out of the room and within minutes was headed back to college. I knew what I had to do—abandon everything in my life and start to worry, fix, control full-time. I began spending most days by the phone. I evaluated Allison's reactions, gestures, and comments. Thoughts circled my mind like buzzards: *What if she never stops? What if I never see her again? What if she overdoses? Or goes to jail?*

Therapy sessions made no impact. Then Allison's sister informed me she was still using. She denied it, refused to see the counselor, dropped out of college, and stopped answering my calls. I was convinced if I forgot about Allison, even for a second, or enjoyed anything, something bad might happen. Several months later, after another night of little sleep, I glanced in the mirror. I could have passed for the addict: dark circles under hopeless eyes.

I called my friend Linda. Her son, also an addict, had been sentenced to state prison. I blurted the saga. Linda didn't sweet-talk. "You need help." "You haven't heard the whole story," I argued. "I'm fine—my daughter, she needs help." "You're addicted to worry and control," Linda said. "I've been where you are. The only one you can control is yourself. It took me years to realize that I'm not in charge. God is," Linda admitted. "By worrying, you're telling God he can't handle things. Go to Al-Anon with me." I didn't open my mouth during the meeting. Every word spoken sounded like my own thoughts: "An alcoholic can't drink, and those of us in this room can't allow an ounce of worry. For us, it's every bit as dangerous and addictive. Worry robs our serenity." I didn't think change was possible. Not for me. But I was destroying my life.

That night at home I got real. "Help me, God. I can't do this without you." I began to ask God for help each morning. I whispered, "Not my job," as worry, fear, or control tried to needle back in.

Two years after that first Al-Anon meeting, Allison and I met for an impromptu lunch. She'd gone back to the same therapist. On her own.

"Thanks, Mom." "For what?"

"When you didn't fix my problems, it scared me. A few times I had to dig change out of the seat of my car for gas money. Some days," she paused, "I didn't have food." My throat felt warm with pride. She'd done it on her own. "I'm making A's. And look," she handed me her checkbook. "I have money again."

Recovery defies logic. It means doing the opposite of what feels natural. When I took care of myself and my addictions, Allison did the same.¹

Give your relationships over to God. Let Him give you the power to weed 'em and reap.

¹Julie W., "Not My Job," Today's Christian (July/August 2008) The names in this story have been changed out of respect for their privacy.