



Family Values

Boundaries: Boundaries and God

Bruce Strade, Chief Operating Officer, Lutheran Community Services Northwest

Even though all knowing, all powerful and present everywhere, God is still a respecter of boundaries. God's design is to be in a relationship with each person. He created the world (and it was good), placed people in it (created in the image of God), established responsibilities (have dominion), set limits (do not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil), stepped back (did not control, gave room to disobey), held them accountable (suffer the consequences of a broken relationship), healed the broken relationship (acts of grace and redemption), while allowing people to go their own way (yet takes no pleasure in our destruction).

God treats each of us as special and unique. As a result, he calls us by name, a phenomenon clearly emphasized when we are baptized into the community of believers. In the Old Testament, God's relationship to people frequently resulted in a name change, such as when Abram became Abraham and Jacob became Israel. The names reflected something that only that person could be or accomplish. God clearly sees each of us as separate and singular. He does not lump us together. We are each one-of-a-kind in the eyes of God.

God respects our no. He does not pull strings nor control our behavior. Should we choose to go our own way without acknowledging God's presence in our lives, God allows us to do that. God gives us a choice. We are free to make up our own minds. He does not intimidate, overwhelm or overpower. Instead God continues to love us and remains available to us.

God prefers honesty and values truth. In this respect, God welcomes our true feelings, including our anger. God wants to be in a real relationship with us, not just one that looks good. Witness Job as he angrily demands justice or the respect that Jesus has for the persistence of the widow in the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-5). Jesus suggests that in our conversations with God we should not hold back, but rather ask, knock and seek. These are active, assertive

words. They are not for the timid or the person without boundaries. Our requests can also influence God and even change God's mind, which is what Abraham tried to do to save Sodom. Indeed, God listens to us and respects what we have to say.

In addition, **God expects us to be responsible to but not responsible for other people.** As such we are called to show consideration and to care about others. At the same time, nowhere are we asked to live other people's lives for them or to not hold people accountable for their behavior. If we do otherwise, we violate the boundaries of others and fail to "love our neighbor as ourselves."

Finally, **God asks that we respect his boundaries.** The essence of the Fall was when Adam and Eve attempted to be something they were not – God. Ironically the result of their attempt to "play god," actually clarified their own identity in relation to God. When we are clear as to who we are, then we are in a better position to know who God is. We need to resist the temptation to "play god," embrace our humanness and imperfections and let God be God. In reality, boundaries help us to be the best we can be—in God's image. May we regularly pray the following:

***Dear God, help me to know who you are
so that I can be all that I am meant to be.***

Adapted from the book: Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, c.1992.

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Portland Office
605 S.E. 39th Avenue, Portland, OR 97214
503-231-748

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