This is a life changing series to help you gain control of your relationships. Part one answers the questions; Why build better relationships and How do I build better relationships? Remy also introduces the concept of boundaries. Part two looks at three boundary busters: The Space Invader, The Sieve and the Wall. Part three looks at seven rights necessary to establish boundaries and how to enforce them through consequences.

Building Better Relationships with Boundaries
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In this document:
- Part One: Why Build Better Relationships?
- Part Two: Boundary Busters
- Part Three: Declaring Your Individuality

Video Clip from Shrek; Shrek and the donkey are talking late at night under the moon. The donkey wonders what it will be like after they rescue the princess and share the swamp. Shrek is adamant that they won’t be sharing the swamp. It’s HIS swamp, not THEIR swamp. He’s going to build a ten foot wall around the swamp and keep people out. He’s had enough rejection. Shrek is upset that people never accept him for who he is but always reject him because he’s an ogre. The donkey reminds him that he’s always accepted Shrek. Starts at 45:38. Ends at 48:35.

You don’t have to be an Ogre to feel like a failure at relationships. I appreciated what the Ogre said. He was sick of dealing with people and his dream was to get back to his swamp and build a ten foot fence around it. Ever feel that way? I know I have!

Today I’m starting a new series called “Building Better Relationships”. I really believe that every one of us here wants - more than anything else – to build better relationships. You may not know how. And it may seem impossible. But in your heart of hearts you long to be known by others and to know them in return.

My guess is that as you look back on your life experience, your best memories are times when you connected deeply with another person emotionally. It may have been for just a second, but something took place that made you feel alive inside. Or, on the other hand, maybe your deepest regret is that you’ve never had a moment like that. Either way, I hope you’ll join me for all six weeks and let’s see if we can help you build better relationships.

Better Relationships Make Life Enjoyable

This morning I want to answer the “why” question and the “how” question about relationships Why build better relationships? and then, just briefly, How do you build better relationships? So, why build better relationships? First, because better relationships make life more enjoyable.

Marla Paul was a columnist for the Chicago Tribune a few years back when she wrote a column on how lonely she was. She had just moved from Dallas to Chicago and was having trouble fitting in to her new life. She wrote…
“This loneliness saddens me. How did it happen that I could be forty-two years old and not have enough friends?”
She said it felt like every woman’s friendship quota had been filled and they were no longer taking applicants. Then she lamented that she felt like the ugly duckling, not fitting in anywhere and experiencing the pain and embarrassment of loneliness.

After Marla wrote the article she was a little uncomfortable with how vulnerable she had been. But then she was shocked at the response. She got seven times the amount of feedback that she usually got. She obviously hit a nerve with everyone from homemakers to CEO’s.

John Ortberg, in his book, “Everyone is Normal Til You Get to Know Them” states that…

“If loneliness is common for women, it is epidemic among men. One survey indicated that 90 percent of the male population in America lacks a true friend. But we prefer to not talk about it.” (page 29).

Ortberg continues on to quote two relational studies that I think are interesting. The first is the Almeda County Study that was headed by a Harvard social scientist. It tracked the lives of 7,000 people over the age of nine and found that the most isolated people were three times more likely to die than those with strong relational connections. People who had bad health habits (like smoking, over eating, alcohol use) but strong social ties lived significantly longer than people with great health habits but lived in isolation.

I like Ortberg’s assessment. He said that this proves that it’s better to eat Twinkies with good friends than to eat broccoli all alone! And listen to this - researcher Robert Putnam, also from Harvard - said that if you belong to no groups but simply decide to join one that, “you cut your risk of dying over the next year in half.” (page 33). Now, I want you to remember that when I ask you to sign up for a small group at the end of this sermon!

In a second study reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association, 276 volunteers were infected with a virus that produces the common cold. The study found that people with strong emotional connections did four times better fighting off illness than those who were more isolated. The emotionally connected people were less susceptible to colds, had fewer viruses, and produced significantly less mucous than relationally isolated people. Again, Ortberg made an interesting observation. After reflecting on the significance of the mucous, he said that it looks like unfriendly people really are snottier than friendly people!

Well, the point here is that relationships are good for us but unfortunately few of us would consider ourselves relational experts – and many of us probably feel like relational misfits. In fact, some people are so desperate for intimacy that they will pay money to join what’s called a “cuddle party”. Maybe you read about them in Newsweek Magazine last summer. Cuddle parties are something that got started out in California. Participants spend $30 to spend the evening snuggling and hugging with as many as 20 complete strangers. The cuddle party website is quick to point out that this isn’t about sex. In fact their guidelines strictly forbid anything sexual taking place. If you go to their website you can read their 16 rules where it says that cuddle parties are “intended to create a safe environment for huggers to get the "touch and affection" missing from everyday life without the threat of unwanted advances.” Huggers of all ages are encouraged to bring pajamas, stuffed animals, munchies, and the anticipation of becoming more secure and approachable than ever before. "Let's Hug," Newsweek (8-30-04).

Well, that might be a little too up close and personal for us here in the Midwest. But it underscores both our longing for relationship as well as our frustration in not being able to find
it. And that shouldn’t surprise us. I mean, where did we learn what we know about relationships? Probably from watching others who didn’t know what they were doing either. I doubt many of us have taken a class on it. Maybe we’ve read a book or two along the way.

But in general we think that relationships should come naturally and don’t require any training. I disagree. Relationships – good relationships – are NOT natural. Dysfunctional, divisive relationships – THOSE are natural. I was just at my married couples small group on Friday and we were all talking about our lack of success at relating with our spouses. Lisa and I have everyone beat by a few decades in terms of length of marriage. But we still don’t have this relationship thing figured out. Sometimes we think we do, but within a day or two we find ourselves giving each other the silent treatment and that’s when I’m convinced that good relationships are not natural. That’s why we need to be taught how to relate to each other and there’s no better place than from the Bible.

**Better relationships please God.**

When you think about the Bible maybe your first thought is that it’s a book about God not people. But as I’ll show you in a second, the Bible is not only about God but about what it means to be human and how to relate to each another. So that leads me to my second answer to the “why” question. Why build better relationships? First, because it makes life more enjoyable. And second, because better relationships please God.

Let me give you a quick survey of what the Bible has to say about relationships. In the opening pages of the Bible, no sooner do we see Adam being created than we learn that God doesn’t think that it’s good for him to be alone. We often speak of being created with a God-shaped void but we were also created with a human-shaped void. God didn’t make us to live in isolation. I know some of us think that isolation is the answer to all our problems. That was Shrek’s conclusion.

But the truth is we were never meant to live alone. God created us for relationship. We are wired to be relational. Unfortunately our ability to relate suffered a major setback after Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. There was a relational breakdown that quickly went from hatred to murder to where Genesis says that violence filled the earth. So, relational issues defined the opening scenes of the Bible.

Fast forward to the book of Exodus. God calls the Israelites to the foot of Mt. Sinai and then calls Moses to the top of the mountain to give him the Ten Commandments. Did you ever notice that seven of the Ten Commandments are simple rules about how to relate to each other?

- You will have no other gods before me
- You will not make idols.
- You will not misuse the LORD’s name.
- You will remember the Sabbath.
- Honor your father and mother.
- Don’t commit murder.
- Don’t commit adultery.
- Don’t steal.
- Don’t give false testimony against your neighbor.
- Don’t covet your neighbor.
You might wonder what makes the Sabbath a relational commandment. It’s relational because taking time to rest gives you time to relate to other people. When you work all the time you aren’t available to develop relationships. So, the majority of the commandments have to do with relating to people.

Now, let’s move into the New Testament. The longest record of Jesus talking at any one time is when he delivered his Sermon on the Mount. If you count up the verses that are about relating to God and compare them to the number of verses about relating to people there are three times as many verses about relating to people. Jesus talks about….

- Anger and conflict
- Adultery and divorce
- Loving your enemies
- Giving to the needy
- Judging others

In fact, how we treat people is so important to Jesus that he said if you know that someone is mad at you it’s more important to mend that relationship than it is to worship God.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23,24

Then, as Jesus closes out his ministry he prays for us that we might live in unity with each other. He says…

*May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.* John 17:22,23

Creating and maintaining unity doesn’t come naturally. It takes a lot of intentional hard work. But when we are able to show the world true love for one another, and not the pettiness and divisiveness that they are used to, they see God.

As we keep moving through the Bible we come to Paul’s teaching. Paul is known for over 50 “one another” passages. He calls believers to…

- Love one another
- Prefer one another
- Care for one another
- Encourage one another
- Forgive one another
- Accept one another
- Be patient with one another
- Bear one another’s burdens
- Admonish one another
- Comfort one another

Paul doesn’t tell us to tolerate each other or simply “put up with” each another. The overriding call is to love one another even when it means sacrificing our best interests. In fact he says…

*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I*
possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

As we move toward the end of the Bible we hear from the apostle John. John talked about the importance of relationships in blunt terms.

If people say, "I love God," but hate their brothers or sisters, they are liars. Those who do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have never seen. 1 John 4:20

And the apostle Peter said that a husband’s prayers are hindered if he doesn’t love his wife.

In the same way, you husbands should live with your wives in an understanding way, since they are weaker than you. But show them respect, because God gives them the same blessing he gives you -- the grace that gives true life. Do this so that nothing will stop your prayers. 1 Peter 3:7

In other words, prayer alone is not what’s important. How you treat other people has a direct influence on how God relates to you.

Why am I giving you all these verses? Because before I launch into a six week series on relationships I don’t want you to think this teaching is a bunch of fluff. I don’t want anyone saying, “Remy never talks about the deep things of God. He just likes to talk about superficial things like relationships.” [Note: I haven’t heard this criticism from people inside of Cedarbrook. But I have heard this criticism from people outside of Cedarbrook who think that we draw large crowds simply because I water down the Bible!] Let me tell you, learning how to build better relationships are the deep things of God! How you treat your family members, your roommate, your employer, your friends – all these relationships reflect your understanding of God and your relationship to God. I often do speak on relationships and that’s because I think the topic is central to what it means to follow Jesus. In fact, how you treat people is a much better indicator of your knowledge of God than your ability to quote scripture or your church attendance record. James said that

“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. James 1:26,27

You see, when people get all excited about God and they tell me they want to do something great for God, I tell them to love their family and friends. The usual response is, “No, I mean I want God to really use me to in ministry.” And my answer is the same; you need to love your family and friends. You see, any ‘great ministry’ has to start there. Too many people run from loving their family and friends because that’s too hard. Too many people end up in ministry because it was easier to pastor a church or become a missionary than it was to love the people in their house and that made them uncomfortable. The problem is, loving people sounds too easy. We act as if anyone can do it. But if we are honest, few of us are doing it well. Nothing pleases God more than our full commitment to loving one another.

Better Relationships are Built with Boundaries

The final point I want to make this morning is to briefly answer the “how” question. How do you build better relationships? One way is by setting boundaries. God created us all with a sense of personal space, both physical and emotional. Boundaries determine where that space
starts and stops. Boundaries define who you are and who you aren’t – where you stop and another person starts – what you are responsible for and what you aren’t responsible for. It’s impossible to honor God in your relationships if you are confused about these boundary issues.

You might say, wait a minute...where are boundaries in the Bible? I don’t remember Jesus saying anything about that! Well, that’s right. The Bible doesn’t use the word “boundaries” but it does talk about the principle of boundaries and gives a number of examples.

Let me point out two in the Old Testament. Over and over again God told his people “This is who I am and this is who I am not”. He had to do this to distinguish himself from the other gods that people served in those days. The gods associated with other religions were often thought to have human character defects. Some of the gods were thought to have bad tempers or to be sexually immoral. So God went out of his way to say to the people, This is who I am, and this is who I’m not. God was laying down boundaries for himself and those boundaries helped define his relationship with his people.

When God spoke to Moses at Mt. Sinai, he had Moses set up physical boundaries at the base of the mountain to emphasize his point. Moses could climb the mountain but not the people. They needed to stay back behind the boundaries. This was God’s way of saying; I’m holy. You’re not. Don’t ever get that confused. Exodus says…

The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. "You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Exodus 19:10-12

And through the prophet Isaiah God said…

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8,9

God was totally different from the people and from other gods and he didn’t want them to forget it.

Now, if defining boundaries is important for God, you can bet that it’s important for you and me too –even more so. We need to better understand who we are and who we aren’t. And then we need to learn how to effectively communicate that to others. That’s what we are going to be looking at in the next few weeks.

April 10: Setting Boundaries in Life
April 17: Boundary Violations: Seven Things that Tick us Off
April 24: Resolving Boundary Violations
May 1: Boundaries in Dating & Marriage
Mothers Day: Boundaries in Parenting

In the next few weeks we’re going to see how boundaries help …

- Clarify what you are responsible for
- Protect you from being hurt
- Reduce false guilt, conflict and stress
- Save time (because when people aren’t messing with your business and you aren’t in their business – life gets a lot less complicated!)
- Make life enjoyable!

So I hope you’ll not only make it a point to be here but invite a friend as well.

**Part Two – Boundary Busters**

A rabbi by the name of Edwin Friedman* tells a story of a man crossing a bridge. The bridge crossed a very deep and treacherous ravine. As the man walked across the bridge he encountered another man coming from the opposite direction. The strange thing was that this man had a very long rope coiled around his body. The man with the rope stopped and said to the first man, “Excuse me, would you mind holding this end of my rope?” Not thinking, the man agreed. Then the man with the rope said, “Thank you” and jumped off the bridge.

The man left holding the rope was dragged to the edge of the bridge and would have gone over if he hadn’t been able to brace himself at the last minute. In shock, he calls down to the man on the rope, “Why did you do this?” And he replies, “Just hold on. If you let go I’ll die. Remember, my life is in your hands.”

The man on the bridge was desperate. He didn’t think he could hold out much longer. He looked to see if he could tie the rope to the bridge but that wasn’t possible. So he looked to see if anyone else was on the bridge that could help but there wasn’t. He called back down, “What do you want me to do?” And he replied, “Just hold on. Remember, I’m your responsibility now.”

The man on the bridge was sick. He didn’t want to let the man go but he knew that sitting there for the rest of his life wasn’t the answer either. He finally came up with an idea. He called back down to the man saying, “Climb back up the rope. I’ll hold on and even pull you as much as I can, but you have to climb the rope.” The man on the rope said, “You can’t be serious. How could you be so selfish? Remember, I’m your responsibility now. You have to take care of me.”

So the man on the bridge was forced to make a very hard decision. He had a boundary dilemma. He wasn’t sure what his responsibility was. Should he stop everything and allow this man to control his life? Or should he let go and live for the rest of his life with the nagging guilt that he let someone die? What would you do? (I’ll come back to answer this dilemma at the end.)

Some of you are saying – That’s exactly my situation and I have no idea what to do. Well, this morning we’re going to take a closer look at this idea of boundaries. Last week I started a six week series called “Building Better Relationships” where I introduced the idea of boundaries. We saw how important it was even for God to set boundaries. Now, today, I hope we’ll find some answers to our boundary dilemmas.

To understand boundaries, let’s start from the beginning. When you were born, you had no boundaries- no personal space. You relied on people coming into your space to feed you, change you, clothe you, house you and love you. But as you grew and matured, the role of your parents was to slowly cut back on their boundaries which allowed you to develop your own boundaries – your own sense of identity.
Psychologists call this process differentiation. The child learns that they are different from their parents. By the time the child is an adult, if the parents have done their job well, the child has become fully differentiated. They see themselves as separate and distinct from their parents. They have a healthy set of boundaries.

Unfortunately, that doesn’t always happen, does it? Many of us have never fully differentiated from our parents or others for that matter. Either we let people into our lives that shouldn’t be there or we enter the lives of others where we shouldn’t be, or thirdly we keep people out of our lives that should be there. Because of this our lives are complicated and stressed – some are pure chaos. And when life is chaos, it’s pretty hard to live your life for God. That’s why learning to set boundaries is so important.

Now, let me put boundaries in practical terms by using my yard as an example. My house sits between two other houses. We have boundaries on each side of the house but they are very different. On the south side of our house our neighbor has a hedge that runs down the boundary line. It’s very obvious where their yard stops and our yard starts. There’s no confusion.

But on the other side there is no physical boundary, just an invisible line. There are boundary markers at the front and back of the property. So you have to line them up to see where the boundary actually is. Now, I’ve got a great neighbor on that side. He is super respectful of that boundary. If his trees ever drop a branch he’s right over there to pick it up. I’ve done my best to respect that line as well.

But let’s say that I’m not such a good neighbor. Let’s say that I slowly encroach on my neighbor’s property. I just start using his space. I plant a garden. I build a shed. And then I’m so bold as to build a fence inside his property line. Now he’s got a real problem. He’s got to make a decision about what he’s going to do.

- He can pull out my fence or burn it if it’s wood or call the police. That would definitely send a message. That’s the aggressive thing to do.
- He can ignore it and hope I realize my error and take my fence down. That’s the passive thing.
- He can build his own fence inside of my fence and then tell all of our neighbors what a jerk I am. That’s the passive/aggressive approach.
- Or he can talk to me and point out the boundary.

Now, with this simple analogy, you know what the right thing to do is, right? I mean, I hope you do! I hope it’s obvious. He should come and talk to me and remind me of the boundary. It’s really a no-brainer.

But in all the conflict that we have in life, how often do we do this? Very little. We attack our boundary breaker, avoid them and build resentment or scheme how to get back at them in indirect ways.

I want to diagram four kinds of boundaries that people have to help us understand how this happens.
Healthy Boundaries:
Let me start with the person who has healthy boundaries. The healthy person is fully differentiated. They know who they are and who they are not. They take responsibility for what is theirs and they allow others to take responsibility for what is not theirs.

Jesus is a great example of a person with healthy boundaries. People came to him all the time, wanting him to be something he wasn’t. One time Jesus was telling his disciples that he was going to endure suffering and be killed. The Bible tells us…

But Peter took him aside and corrected him. "Heaven forbid, Lord," he said. "This will never happen to you!" Matthew 16:22

Jesus turned right around and rebuked Peter. He wasn’t going to let Peter tell him who he was. Jesus had boundaries. He knew that suffering and death was his calling and he wasn’t going to let Peter change that.

Then there was Jesus’ crucifixion. This is how Matthew tells it…

Two criminals were crucified with him, their crosses on either side of his. And the people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. “If you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!” …In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him. Matthew 27:38-40,44

But Jesus didn’t feel any compulsion to prove himself to these criminals or the crowd. He didn’t let their abuse change his course.

Finally, Jesus was able to stand the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. Satan came with three temptations – the first was for Jesus to turn stones into bread. The second was to throw himself off the temple and have angels save him. And the third was to worship Satan so he would receive the kingdoms of the world. Philip Yancey comments on these verses saying…

“Satan was, in effect, dangling before Jesus a speeded-up way of accomplishing his mission. He could win over the crowds by creating food on demand and then take control of the kingdoms of the world, all the while protecting himself from danger. The Jesus I Never Knew, page 74

Jesus was able to refuse each temptation because he had a clear understanding of who he was and who he wasn’t. So, that’s what it looks like to have healthy boundaries. Jesus is our example. But let’s look at people who aren’t so healthy. (That’s you and me!)

Space Invaders:
First, there are the Space Invaders. The Space Invader doesn’t have an end to their sense of self. Anything and anybody is in the realm of their boundaries. But each space invader has a different motivation.
Some are **controlling** – they like to tell people what to do, when to do it and how to do it. This is how one woman describes her boss…

“What is the most opinionated and demanding man I’ve ever met. No matter how convincing someone else’s ideas are, he always insists on doing things his way – even if it is more expensive or unnecessary. And it’s impossible for him to delegate. He leaves nothing to chance. He’ll call in to the office to “just check in” to be sure his employees are doing what he wants, the way he wants because only he knows how things should really be done. Whatever job he gives you, you can be certain he will eventually critique it, amend it, correct it, improve on it, upgrade it, or in some other way put his stamp on it.” Control Freak, Les Parrott, III page 10.

Another reason that people are space invaders is that they are **hyper-responsible** – they carry the weight of the world on their shoulders. No one else is quite as competent or reliable as they are and so they see it as being up to them to take matters into their own hands. In their mind, if they don’t do it, it won’t get done or it will be done poorly. And so they find ways to invade people’s space and take charge. They would probably never see themselves as a space invader because they don’t mean to invade someone’s space. They are simply trying to get a job done. But in doing so, they invade space.

Then there are space invaders that are **insensitive, unaware and self-absorbed**. These people invite themselves over, sit too close, talk too much and stay too late. And when they get home they call you after you’re asleep and have the nerve to ask you if they woke you up!

In fact, there’s a funny movie about this kind of person called **What about Bob?** Bob is a very needy man whose is seeing a psychiatrist (Leo). Leo goes on vacation, primarily to get away from Bob, but Bob is so needy that he follows him to his cabin and actually gets his family to invite him over for dinner. Not only does Bob take over the house, he wins over the affection of the Leo’s family. Let’s watch.

**Movie Clip:** *Bob is nearly worshipped at the family dinner table. Meanwhile Leo is highly agitated at Bob’s presence. Bob seems to get all the attention from family members while Leo is seen as unreasonable.*

If you are a space invader, there is one thing you need to learn and that is to ask permission to enter someone’s space. It’s important for you to see everyone as having a fence around them with a gate. Before you can enter their space you need to “knock” and ask if you can come in. If they say “no” then you need to walk away.

**The Sieve:**

Now, the other side to this scenario is the person who let’s their space be invaded and I call them The Sieve. They either have no boundaries or very weak ones. Here are a couple examples of sieves:

First, there’s the **People Pleaser.** The people pleaser hates conflict and avoids it at all cost. Keeping the peace is their highest goal so they let space invaders in even when they don’t want them there. They don’t know how to say “no” because they don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings. Listen to what a man said who went to see a counselor for his depression.

“I’m realizing now that I’ve never said no to anyone. “In order not to let down my family, my wife, my boss, and my friends, I’ve worked later, longer, and harder than anyone I know. I even
feel that God depends on me for everything, too. And I’m so busy taking care of everyone else’s requests for my time that I’ve been ignoring my own needs. No wonder I’ve felt burned out for years.” Secrets of the Family Tree, page 166.

People pleasers may also fear rejection. They have a high need to needed or liked. They will even compromise their values just to be accepted. Time magazine has an interesting interview with Jane Fonda this week. You probably have to be in your forties or older to know Jane Fonda. She is the daughter of a famous actor (Henry Fonda), an actress herself and probably most known for going to Hanoi during the Vietnam War to protest the War.

Reading about her life is a lesson in boundaries – or not having boundaries. She has been married three times and she admits that she became whatever each husband wanted her to be. She said that she had the disease of trying to please everyone but herself. When her first husband brought prostitutes home to their bed, she not only allowed it but joined in. She said… “Maybe he smelled it on my skin when we first met – that I was malleable and insecure in my sexuality. In any event, I was vulnerable to him and felt that in order to keep him and be a good wife, I had to prove that I was…It never occurred to me to object. If this was what he wanted, this was what I would give him…” Time Magazine – 4/11/05

After she got divorced she married a political activist (Tom Haydn) and that’s when she became a war protester and went to Hanoi. Finally, she married Ted Turner – the man who started CNN – and she morphed again to become the traditional corporate wife. Jane Fonda became whomever her husbands wanted her to become because her boundaries had big gaping holes in them. She was a sieve. As I said before, a lack of boundaries leads to stress and chaos. Fonda tells in her interview that she expressed her stress by binging and purging (bulimia) for thirty years of her life.

Another type of sieve is the person who feels powerless. Their powerlessness is usually learned through some kind of physical or sexual abuse. Their boundaries are violated so often and so severely that they become convinced that they don’t even have the right to have boundaries. I think this is illustrated by a story I heard about a doctor and a girl. A mother brought her twelve year old daughter to this doctor. The girl was a prostitute. The doctor needed to perform a pelvic exam and asked permission to touch her. After the exam the mother pulled him aside and said that that was the first time a man had ever asked permission to touch her.

This young girl had been sexually abused from very early on and then she turned to prostitution. She had no concept of what it meant to have a physical boundary. Her reality was that men took what they wanted and she had no say in the matter. She considered herself lucky if they left some money by her bed.

So, both the people pleaser and the powerless let people into their lives that shouldn’t be there. Just like the space invader, these people need to visualize a fence around them with a gate. They need to understand how valuable they are to God. The reason they don’t protect themselves is that they truly believe they are worthless. They aren’t valuable enough to keep people out. But if they can regain their sense of value (something only God can give) they can learn to establish boundaries. Then they need to be empowered to tell people to knock and ask permission to enter. Plus they need the courage to say “no”, “not now” or “go away!” It’s also important for The Sieve to learn how to enforce consequences if the space invader doesn’t listen.
The Wall:
The final type of boundary is The Wall. This person has usually been wounded emotionally at some point in their life and so they protect themselves at all costs. Their boundaries are high and thick. Do you remember what Shrek said in that movie clip last week? He said that he wanted to go to his swamp and build a ten foot high wall all around it to keep people out. That’s exactly what I’m talking about. This kind of person expresses their pain in one of two opposite ways.

One way is as a caretaker. Because they know what it’s like to be hurt, they are quick to come to the aid of others who hurt. But they would never make themselves vulnerable. They keep all their emotions bottled up inside. They take care of others but they will never allow others to care for them.

The other way the wounded express their pain is by being callous and indifferent, even cold. Their past wound makes them numb to both their own feelings as well as others. Unlike the caretaker, they seem to ignore the needs of others. They live in a world by themselves. They are withdrawn and disengaged.

Both the caretaker and the callous need to get help to learn how to rebuild trust and intimacy with people. Ten foot walls are not normal. In their mind there are two extremes. Either you make yourself vulnerable and let people hurt you or you erect walls and keep people out. They’ve lost the balance in relationships and God wants to help them restore that.

Well, there you have it. What kind of boundaries do you have? I’ll admit it. I’m a space invader. I work hard at not invading people’s space but I know I still do. If you aren’t sure of your boundary type then ask someone. They know. In fact, if you have a space invader sitting next to you I bet they already elbowed you to tell you what you are!

And that leads me to my final point. The study of boundaries is a venture into dangerous territory. Laying down boundaries will create conflict. That’s why I put a warning at the bottom of your notes: Warning! Establishing healthy boundaries may be hazardous to your existing relationships!

Boundaries can seem like relationship busters not builders to the people in your life. People will misunderstand you. When you put down a boundary in your relationship, you are either telling someone to back off a bit or to step up to the plate and start pulling their weight. A lot of people are insecure and when you do this they feel rejected and judged. That’s why when you lay down boundaries it’s important that you do it in wisdom and with grace. You have to anticipate people’s anger and you have to prepare for their trying to make you feel guilty because I guarantee it will happen. But don’t let them scare you. Putting boundaries in place will help you build better relationships. And like I said last week, boundaries make life enjoyable and help you to please God.

Let me close by going back to the bridge story. What should you do? Before I tell you, let me just say that this is my opinion. You have the right to your own opinion based on your boundaries. My answer is based on my boundaries.

So, what would I do if someone jumped off a bridge and left me holding the rope? I’d let him drop like a rock! Let me tell you why.
• I never asked for the role of caretaker in his life. He dumped it on me.
• I never agreed to it. For all he knew I was on my way to save twenty children caught in a burning bus or to perform an open heart surgery. His selfish act may have cost the lives of many others simply because he didn’t consider the impact of his decision.
• He never asked my permission or asked me how my life might be affected. That was a risk he took and it was his mistake, not mine. He needs to own that mistake, not me.
• I offered him a fair solution to the dilemma that he rejected.

So I’d let him go. You see, he is really the one choosing to fall to his death, not me. I gave him a way out but he refused to take it. So, I am able to resume my walk across the bridge without guilt. People may want to try and make me feel guilty but I won’t take that on because it’s outside of my responsibility. And I’ll tell you right now, if I ever did that to you, I’d want you to let me drop too. Okay? Let me drop. You go live the life that God called you to live and don’t let my selfishness stop you.

**Prayer:** *Father, many of us are realizing this morning that we have some boundaries issues. We’ve let people into our lives who shouldn’t be there, we’ve kept people out who should be there, and we’ve invaded the lives of others without their permission. Please forgive us. And help us to find the courage to make the necessary corrections. Amen.*

* This story is quoted in The Emotionally Healthy Church by Peter Scazzero.

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### Part Three - Declaring My Individuality

**Skit:** A couple sends their kids away to the grandparents in hopes of a romantic weekend alone. But no sooner are the kids gone that the neighbors walk in ready for a night of fun and games. The romantic couple can’t say “no” to their neighbors and so they endure them.

Last week I talked about three kinds of boundary problems; The Space Invader, The Sieve and The Wall. Our two couples here are great examples of The Space Invader and The Sieve. The Space Invader has no sense of where their boundaries stop. They push their boundaries out to envelope everyone in their path. The Sieve has no sense of where their boundaries start. They don’t have the confidence to establish a boundary. As long as that boundary confusion exists between two people there will always be chaos in their relationship.

This morning I want to focus primarily on helping those of us who are Sieves -those of us who find it hard to say “no” to Space Invaders. Last week I said that The Sieve lacks good boundaries because they let people into their space that shouldn’t be there. The Sieve…avoids conflict at all cost, fears being rejected, feels powerless to resist others and quickly complies with The Space Invader.

You see, The Sieve is so insecure that they doubt whether or not they even have the right to their own space. That’s why they are so quick to let other people into it. They assume that everyone else is more deserving than they are so they minimize their rights and let other people invade their space and tell them what to do. Laying down your rights sounds spiritual, but if you lay
down all your rights, all the time, you lose your identity. You lose all definition as a person. And that’s not a good thing!

Instead of giving up their rights, people who are Sieve’s need to declare their rights. That’s what I want to walk you through this morning: A Declaration of Individuality. It’s not a Declaration of Independence. God didn’t create us to isolate ourselves from one another. But he did call us to be distinct individuals. A Declaration of Individuality helps us to establish our personal space and distinguish ourselves from each other. And when we do that, we are finally free to start building better relationships. Let’s take a look at these.

**My Declaration of Individuality**

1. **The Time Right.** *I have the right to determine how I spend my time, even if I waste it.*

   Our time is in demand all day long. There is always something to do, some place to go, as well as e-mails and phone calls to return. It’s even hard for some of us to go to bed because we want to squeeze a little more time out of our day. How we choose to spend our time defines who we are and who we’ll become.

   One way I guard my time is by not having a cell phone. I’ve made a personal commitment to be the last person on earth who buys one! I know a lot of you have one. But for me it would be a big time waster. I don’t want to be that accessible. I need my space. For the same reason, I don’t view or send emails on Friday- that’s my day off. It’s not really a day off for me if I view and send 50 emails. I enjoy my day off a lot more without the added clutter in my head.

   You see, declaring your Time Right has a lot to do with saying “no” to opportunities. For me, I’ve said “no” to the opportunities to have a cell phone and use email on Friday’s. The Leader Telegram recently printed an article called *Families in Motion Losing Out.* It talked about how busy the average double income family is. It said…

   “parents and children live virtually apart at least five days a week, reuniting for a few hours at night…When they are together, today’s families tend to stay in motion with lessons, classes, and games. Or, they go shopping…What’s falling by the wayside? Playtime. Conversation. Courtesy. Intimacy.” *Families in Motion Losing Out* by Joseph B. Verrengia, Associated Press. 3/26/05

   But that doesn’t have to happen. It’s a choice. We all have the right to say “no” to adding more and more activities to our lives. That’s our Time Right. We need to declare it and then enforce it.

2. **The Intellectual Right.** *I have the right to think and express my thoughts even if they are mistaken.*

   I learned this right the hard way. I’ve had a couple people in my life who thought it was their responsibility to tell me what to think. I hated it. It was so demeaning to have someone totally discount my thoughts. It made me very angry.

   But when the second person treated me this way, it dawned on me that I treated Lisa the same way I was being treated. Whenever Lisa disagreed with me on an important topic I’d overpower
her with my reasoning and tone and shut her down. I was essentially saying that her thoughts weren’t valuable. Only my thoughts were valuable so if she wanted to be valuable she needed to think like me. I’m sure I did that with my kids too at the time. Maybe someone is doing that to you right now.

The truth is we all have the right to think and express our thoughts. They may not make sense to others but that doesn’t invalidate you and your right to express them. So don’t let people shut you down or make you feel stupid for your thoughts.

3. **The Emotional Right.**

   *I have the right to feel and express my emotions (appropriately) even if they are misguided.*

People often don’t want us to express our emotion because it makes them feel bad. Have you ever had a bad day but someone either got mad at you for feeling bad or went out of their way to make you happy? They tried to “fix” your mood. They do that because they don’t know how to handle negative emotions. They think it’s their responsibility to fix the problem either by making you happy or correcting you. But if they were able to be honest, they’d see that their true motivation in changing you is to simply make themselves feel better.

Parents are especially guilty of denying their children the right to emotion. They’ll often discipline them for being sad or mad. And it’s too bad because then kids learn that expressing emotions is naughty. When kids can’t express their emotion they learn to be phony. Then they stuff their emotion which causes all kinds of problems later in life.

Churches deny the right to emotions too. I recently read about Glenn Wagner, a pastor at a large church in North Carolina. He resigned last September due to clinical depression. In a recent magazine he told his story and quoted a survey saying...

“Surveys indicate that 80 percent of pastors and 84 percent of their spouses are discouraged or dealing with depression. In addition, more than 40 percent of pastors and 47 percent of their spouses report that they are suffering from burnout.” Physician magazine, September/October 2000, quoted by Glenn Wagner in Rev.

Thankfully I’m not counted in those statistics. I think pastors, like Glenn, end up discouraged, depressed and burned out because they have poor boundaries. In Wagner’s case, he said his depression was twice as painful because in his church it wasn’t okay to be depressed. His leadership team didn’t give him the right to have emotions. They implied that he was either weak or sinful or had a demon for being depressed.

But I want to empower you today to feel and express your emotion. God gave you emotions to alert you to issues that you wouldn’t be aware of any other way. When you suppress your emotions you cover up truth and it robs you of the fullness of life that God meant for you.

4. **The Spiritual Right.**

   *I have the right to believe what I want to believe about God and express my faith in the manner that I choose - even if I’m mistaken.*

There’s something about our humanity that likes telling other people how to worship God. We’ve all encountered people who are quick to quote a Bible verse to tell us why we shouldn’t think what we think or do what we do. They may not like the Bible translation we use, or the
kind of music our church plays or how we serve communion. They just won’t be satisfied until we worship God the way they do.

How does that make you feel? It’s offensive, right? You don’t like being told how to worship God. No one does. But people with weak boundaries tolerate it because they aren’t sure about their faith. They think there’s a chance that their critic is right so they keep listening to them.

But we have the right to believe what we want to about God. That’s the great thing about God. He absolutely respects us and doesn’t force his thinking on us. He even lets us be wrong. He won’t violate our free will. If that’s God’s attitude toward us then we shouldn’t let religious people intimidate us into conforming to their way of thinking. We are free to believe what we want to believe.

I think that’s why a lot of people stay away from church. They don’t want someone insisting on how they should think about God. I think that’s fair. I appreciate that. That’s why I try hard to respect people’s boundaries here when I speak. I’m passionate and I’m persuasive. But when I cross the line and start telling people how they should think, then I’ve gone too far. I never want to imply that people need to think like I do to either please me or be pleasing to God. If you think I do that, please let me know.

5. **The Physical Right.**

   *I have the right to determine how I am touched even if it seems unfriendly.*

We all have different comfort levels when it comes to personal space and touch. You have the right to determine how people enter your space and then communicate that boundary. Maybe this T-shirt would help some of you communicate your comfort zone (it reads – *If You Can Read This You Are Too Close For My Comfort*). You don’t have to feel guilty if you aren’t as huggy and kissy as your friends.

I’m not a big hugger personally. My dad was a staunch German and I don’t think I hugged him until I was in college and I initiated it. I had just become a Christian and I was learning that Christians should do that kind of thing. So I hugged my dad and he hugged me back and from that time on we always hugged good-bye.

It’s not that I don’t like to hug but I reserve hugs for a bigger occasion. If I haven’t seen you in a month, I might hug you. Or if I just had a heartfelt conversation with you I might close it with a hug. But if I just saw you last night you probably aren’t going to get a hug this morning. That’s just me. It’s not right or wrong. It just is. That’s my right. If you like to hug more than that that’s fine. Just go find someone else to hug!

6. **The Sexual Right.**

   *I have the right to determine how I am touched sexually even if I am married.*

This is a continuation of The Physical Right, only more specific. Just because you are dating a Christian doesn’t mean that they won’t overstep sexual boundaries. It happens all the time. Some people relax their boundaries thinking they don’t have to worry since they are dating a believer. I wish that was true – but it’s not. So you need to have it clear in your mind what God’s boundaries are before you ever kiss. But that’s your right. Don’t let someone talk you out of it.
As for married couples, you don’t lose your individuality just because you are married. You still have the right to determine how and when you engage sexually. Sex should never be manipulated or coerced or demanded by your spouse. It should be mutually agreed upon. That’s your right.

7. **The Rescue Right.**

I have the right to not rescue or take responsibility for people even if that makes me look uncaring.

The first six rights have to do with keeping people from invading your space. This last one has to do with preventing people from dragging you into their space. I hear this in conversations every day. People with weak boundaries are guilted into taking responsibility for something or somebody that’s not their responsibility.

So be careful. Don’t let people use your love for them or your faith or the Bible to manipulate you. They might say things like, “If you really loved me you’d rescue me from my crisis.” Or, “if you were a real Christian you’d give me the money.” Or, other times we take responsibility – not because someone manipulated us – but simply because we feel that a good Christian always rescues people. That’s not true. Even Jesus didn’t feel compelled to drop everything and rescue every body he encountered.

I’m personally very careful with how much I help any one person. Being in a helping profession I could be overwhelmed in a week if I felt responsible to rescue everyone I encounter. I want to be a part of the solution for someone’s crisis but I can’t afford to be the solution. If I sacrifice all my time and money to rescue one person then I’m not available to help other people, not to mention my own family. Whenever I sense that either someone is looking to me to solve all their problems or I’m viewing myself as the total solution for someone’s problems, a red flag goes up and I back away. Jesus is the Savior of the world. Not me and not you either. So don’t take that on. You’ll only burn out and become bitter and resentful toward people. You’ll start seeing every person as a burden and not a blessing.

Now declaring your rights is one thing. Enforcing them is another. Let’s look at how to do that.

**How to enforce appropriate boundaries.**

1. **Have a clear biblical sense of your value as God’s child.**

Do you know the number one reason that we are confused about our boundaries? We don’t think we are valuable. It’s a self worth issue. The Sieve let’s people invade their space because they think every one else’s needs are more important than their own. They find value by trying to please others.

And The Space Invader invades people’s space in search of worth. If they can get you to be like them and do what they say, that makes them feel valuable. But if we could simply accept the value that God has placed on us, a lot of the problems I’ve been talking about would be resolved.

The most basic proof that we have value is in the simple fact that God created us. Everything and everybody that God creates is valuable. Period. It’s impossible for God to create anything
that’s not valuable. So, no matter what you’ve done or no matter what’s been done to you, you are still valuable simply because God created you.

And we aren’t valuable just because we believe in Jesus. The Bible tells us that Jesus died for us while we were still separated from Him.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

Jesus wouldn’t have died for us if he didn’t think we were valuable. He saw our worth even before we came to faith. Even while we were knee deep in our confusion and failure he accepted us.

But if we are valuable to him as failures, how much more valuable are we once we believe?

“So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God’s very own children, adopted into his family--calling him "Father, dear Father." For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God’s children.” Romans 8:15-17

We are God’s children. He’s adopted us. He’s given us his Spirit. And we can call him our Father. I can’t think of how we could have any higher value than this.

2. **Clearly communicate your boundaries.**
   You can’t assume that people know what your boundaries are. You need to clearly spell them out – even write them down if necessary.

3. **Clearly communicate consequences for violating those boundaries.**
   Consequences shouldn’t be punishment. They are simply natural ramifications of people’s decision making process. For instance, if you are dating someone who is chronically late, tell them that if they continue to be late that you aren’t going to sit around waiting for them. You’ll make other plans for the evening. When they come late and find you gone, they’ll realize that if they want to date you they’ll need to change their behavior.

4. **Consistently confront violations.**
   Sometimes it gets old reminding people of your boundaries and applying the consequences but you have to realize that Space Invaders will always test you. Just like a two year old, they try to wear you down, so you have to prove to them that you mean business.

5. **Enforce consequences dispassionately.**
   This is very important. You can’t lose your cool. And that’s the great thing about boundaries - you don’t have to. Instead of screaming at your chronically late date because you feel so disrespected, you just go out and do something else. It’s not up to you to convince him or her how wrong they are. Your actions make the statement. Then they have to decide how they will respond.

6. **Find supporters to encourage your follow through.**
   Most of us aren’t going to go from having weak boundaries to strong ones simply because we heard a sermon. So we need to find people that will remind us of our value and encourage us to keep our boundaries and consequences in place. That’s one of the reasons we all need to develop relationships here with each other. We can support each other in these things.
If you can see that your boundaries are like a sieve, then I hope you’ll declare your rights and enforce your boundaries with consequences. That’s what will define you as an individual and that’s what will enable you to build better relationships.

The message that I want you to hear today is that you are valuable and acceptable just the way you are. You may not be right. In fact, you may be totally messed up and totally wrong in all your beliefs and actions! But that doesn’t alter your value as a person. So don’t let people invalidate you because you didn’t live up to their expectations. Your value doesn’t come from pleasing them. Your value comes from accepting God’s opinion of you.

Now, I wonder if there’s anyone here who says, *It’s nice to be accepted and respected by God but I want more than that. I want to be his child. I want God to adopt me as his own. I want his Spirit to fill me. I want to be able to call him Father because I know him personally. That is what I need to feel valuable.*

If that’s your desire, let me pray for you this morning.

*Father, thank you for your unconditional love for every one of us here. But there are some of us here who want to move from merely being loved by you to becoming your child. The Bible says that whoever welcomes Jesus into their lives and believes in his name, these are given the right to become your children. So give them the faith right now to do just that. Holy Spirit, fill their lives with your power in an unmistakable way. Might they know how real you are. Amen.*

And in regard to setting boundaries…

*Father, help us to find the courage in your Spirit to not only declare our rights but enforce them with consequences. Help us to persevere and not give up even though our boundaries are tested. We truly want to build better relationships and we know establishing boundaries is key to our success. Amen.*

(The following points were deleted from the sermon due to time…)

**Space Invaders should remember to…**

- **value every person as if they were Jesus.** Jesus said that when we deal with the most vulnerable person we are dealing with him. To violate another person’s boundaries is to violate Jesus. He created them. He loves them. He values them so much he died for them. How can we treat them with any less respect than we’d treat Jesus himself?
- **visualize a gated fence around every person.** I mentioned this last week. What do millionaires have at their gate? Either an intercom or a guard. You have to ask permission to enter the gates. That’s how you should view each person that you encounter.
- **not make assumptions about other peoples boundaries.** Your boundaries won’t look like someone elses’. Your boundaries have a lot to do with how you were raised and the experiences you’ve had. One thing never do as a counselor is to assume that people want me to pray for them. I almost always ask permission. I don’t know if anyone has ever said “no” but I do it to let them know that I respect their boundaries. It’s a way for me to show that they are valuable.
- **not force their opinions or expectations on others.**
• *ask permission to enter the space of another.*
• *speak well of others even if they disagree with them.* Is easy for space invaders to have a pity party when they are told to “keep out” of someone’s life. In their anger they often feel the need to put that person down – remember a space invader is looking to affirm their worth and being told to keep out only adds to their shame. But you need to bite your tongue. Even if you had good intentions for invading someone’s space, you still need to value their rights.