A continuation of the six part series. Part four looks at Jesus’ words about how to resolve conflict. Part five takes a closer look at boundaries, giving specific advice. Plus, six questions on boundaries are answered that were submitted by listeners. Part six looks at applying the lessons of boundaries to raising children.

Building Better Relationships
...with boundaries
by Remy Diederich
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This document contains:
- Part 4: How to Resolve Conflict
- Part 5: A Closer Look at Boundaries
- Part 6: Boundaries in Children

**Part Four - How to Resolve Conflict**

About ten years ago I co-owned a dairy farm on top of the Knapp hill, west of town about ten miles. Our house was just inside the west edge of our property line. I liked being there - for a lot of reasons - but one was that our neighbor grazed his cows’ right outside our windows. It was fun watching the cows during the day and at night I enjoyed falling asleep to the sound of them chewing the grass.

One night I heard their chewing, but it seemed a lot closer than usual. Suddenly the sound was coming from three sides of our house instead of one – kind of like “surround sound”. I knew something was up so I jumped up and flipped on the yard light. Sure enough, the cows had pushed through the barbed wire fence and taken advantage of the fresh grass in our yard. Plus they left some free fertilizer!

This is a perfect example of what happens when someone crosses our boundaries. As long as the boundary is being respected, everything is fine. Even if they are “right outside of our window”, so to speak, we feel safe because we know that a boundary is being observed and respected. But as soon as that boundary is crossed, it gets messy and confusing, doesn’t it! We don’t always know what to do.

Now, we all respond to boundary violations in different ways. Let me diagram this for you…

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Boundary Violation >> Anger <<choice>> Response
  • retaliate
  • retreat (nice)
  • resolve
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Whenever your boundaries are crossed, you immediately get angry at some level. Anger is a great boundary detector. It will always let you know when someone has invaded your space. Then, your anger moves you to take action – to respond. Now notice that you have a choice at this moment. Many people don’t think they have a choice – they say things like, “I was so angry I couldn’t help it!” But that’s not true. You determine the role that anger takes in your life, whether it will be con-structive or de-structive.
Some people automatically retaliate while others retreat. Those are both de-structive. (We’re going to learn how to be constructive today by seeking to resolve our conflict.) Those of us that retreat often do it because we want to be “nice”. In Wisconsin, we like to be nice. And in the church we like to be even nicer. One therapist said that “One of the greatest encouragers of niceness is the church.” (Anne Wilson Schaef)

That’s not a compliment. She meant that we are afraid to be honest with each other. And because we are afraid to be honest we create dysfunctional, unhealthy, and even chaotic relationships in our families, our friendships and our churches.

We aren’t nice because Jesus taught us to be nice. Jesus never talked about being nice. The truth is that we are nice because we are full of fear. Fear motivates our niceness. In the book “Boundaries in Marriage” it lists a number of the fears that keep us from being honest with each other…

- we fear losing love
- we fear the anger and judgment of others
- we fear our own anger
- we fear being alone if we are rejected
- we fear losing approval
- we fear hurting people’s feelings
- we fear being wrong and feeling guilty

Instead of telling us to be nice, Jesus told us to shoot straight with each other. "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the fault. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses.” Matthew 18:15,16

**How to Resolve Conflict**

I want to break these two verses down for you. I know it seems simple, and it should be obvious, but we have the hardest time with this. So let’s look at how to resolve conflict by talking to our boundary breaker.

1. **Admit that conflict exists.** I bet there are a number of us here today who are in conflict with someone, but don’t want to admit it. Conflict is that elephant in your living room that you don’t want to acknowledge. But if you want that elephant gone, then you have to admit it’s there.

I was at a pastor’s conference this week and one pastor said he trained his congregation to say this simple phrase…“Reality is my friend.” What that means is that our only hope of change is to embrace the painful truth about our condition. If you have an elephant in your living room then reality is your friend. Admitting the reality that you have an elephant is what’s going to help you get rid of it. If you treat reality as your enemy then you’ll do silly things like try to hide the elephant or go through cases of Fabreeze trying to cover up the smell.
But the quickest way to a better living room is to simply face reality and admit that you’ve got an unwanted guest. The same is true for conflict. Some of you are depressed. Some of you aren’t sleeping well. Others have hostility just beneath the surface or some of you have it boiling over! If you want to deal with these things you need to recognize that reality is your friend and admit the conflict that exists in your life.

2. **Identify the crossed boundary.** Remember what I said? Anger is a boundary detector. Whenever you find yourself angry, just ask yourself, why? What boundary was crossed? Before you can talk to your offender you need to have it clear in your own mind what the boundary violation was.

   But be careful how you answer. It’s often more complex than what you think. For example, if you come an hour late to pick me up for a concert – with no good excuse – I might think that I’m mad because you crossed my *time* boundary. You wasted my time and we missed part of the concert. But a deeper reason for my anger is more likely that you crossed my *respect* boundary. Coming late made me feel like you don’t respect me and that’s the real reason I’m mad. So be honest about why you are mad.

3. **Pray, cool down and gain perspective.** I think of conflict as a fire. How I response will either add to the fire or reduce the fire. I don’t want to add gas to the fire. I want to add water. That is, I want to bring *resolution* to the problem not *retribution*. So, in your situation, slow down and ask God what you can do to *resolve* your conflict. And then commit yourself to do just that.

4. **Go to your offender only.** Now, as clear as Jesus is here about who to talk to, what do we often do? We go complain to someone else, right? Now, I understand why. We want to make sure we are seeing things straight. We want some input. I think those are good motives. But good motives don’t always accomplish God’s will. And sometimes our motives aren’t good at all. We just want to retaliate by trashing the other person.

   When we include a third person in our conflict, there’s a fancy word for that called, “triangulation”. Let’s think about the cows in my yard again. Instead of calling up the owner of the cows, let’s say I decide to call a friend. I just created a triangle; me, my neighbor and my friend. I tell him what happened, how amazed I am that my neighbor allowed his fence to deteriorate, how irresponsible he is, what a hardship this has brought to my family. All these things may be true, but how is that helping to get the cows out of my yard? It’s not.

   Venting my anger might make *me* feel better but now it’s gotten my friend upset. He’s offended on my behalf. I have spread my dis-ease to him. And I’ve given him a problem that’s impossible for him to solve. I’ve opened a loop for him that he can’t close. He can’t call my neighbor because he knows that it’s none of his business. But he’s all upset. So what does he do? How does he relieve his anxiety that I’ve dumped on him? He calls another friend and spreads his dis-ease to them. That makes him feel better but now *his* friend has the dis-ease. By the end of the day, half of Knapp is angry at my neighbor but none of them can do anything to help me or to confront him.

   There’s only one person that can solve my problem and that’s my neighbor. That’s why Jesus tells me to go to him, not any one else. The only exception to this is if you go to a
counselor to gain wisdom on how to talk to your offender. But, in general, don’t include others in your offense. You are only adding gas to the fire.

Now, if you do spread your dis-ease, it’s your responsibility to go back to every person infected, ask their forgiveness, and set the story straight. This advice is especially important to follow in a church. Many churches have split and even dissolved because people refused to obey Jesus and chose to spread their dis-ease instead.

5. **Go with humility.** Matthew 18 (the chapter that Jesus’ words are found) starts off with the disciples wondering who would be the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus must have rolled his eyes and shaken his head. He knew that nothing good could come from that kind of question. He knew that pride always puffs people up and causes them to exclude others.

So, Jesus talks to his disciples about the importance of including children, then he talks about the importance of including the one sheep that goes astray and then he talks about the importance of including the person who has offended you. You see, because the proud think they are better than others, they think that the weak, the wrong and the lost are expendable. That’s our temptation, isn’t it? Rather than talk to our offender we would rather cut them out of our lives. That’s the easy thing to do. But the kingdom of God isn’t about excluding others, it’s about including them and doing whatever we have to do to help make that happen even if it’s at our expense.

So when you go to point out someone’s fault go in humility. Understand that you aren’t better than your offender.

6. **Go to restore.** Jesus didn’t tell us to “go and confront”. Or to “go and shame or humiliate”. We don’t go to “set people straight”. Jesus said that we are to go to win them back. That is, to restore their relationship to you, the church and even God. Paul must have had this in mind when he said to the Galatian church…

*My friends, you are spiritual. So if someone is trapped in sin, you should gently lead that person back to the right path.* Galatians 6:1

That’s what God did with us. He went out of his way to restore us to relationship with Himself and he wants us to do the same things with others. Boundary violations aren’t an excuse to give people the boot. Boundary violations are an opportunity to clarify our relationship with people and restore them back to fellowship.

7. **Go in private.** Sometimes our fear of confronting our offender, one-on-one, causes us to confront them in front of others. We feel the need to protect ourselves. Or sometimes it’s our laziness or insensitivity that leads us to do that. Parents often make the mistake of correcting their children at the dinner table. That’s a bad idea for two reasons; one, no one wants to be corrected in front of the family and two, children start to associate family meals with being corrected and humiliated. Parents, you’d be much better off to ask your child to stick around after dinner to speak to them alone.

But no matter who you are confronting, make sure that it is in private. When you expose someone’s wrong in public you are only asking for them to shut down and withdraw or to fight back. Neither one is going to help resolve the conflict. Again, you are only adding gas to the fire.
8. **Take responsibility for as much as you possibly can.** If you come to me and tell me how wrong I am, you immediately put me on the defensive. That’s human nature. You’ve made it very hard for me to be vulnerable with you and admit my offense. But if you come to me and start by telling me how you’ve failed in our relationship, you cause me to drop my guard and I am suddenly willing to share how I’ve failed you. It’s much easier for me to own what I’m responsible for if you first own what you are responsible for. Jesus put it this way…

*Why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log from your own eye; then perhaps you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.* Matthew 7:3-5

9. **Point out the fault.** In the book, *Boundaries*, the authors talk about the Law of Exposure. They say that too many of us have secret boundaries that leave people in the dark as to who we really are.

“We withdraw passively and quietly, instead of communicating an honest “no” to someone we love. We secretly resent instead of telling someone that we are angry about how they have hurt us. Often, we will privately endure the pain of someone’s irresponsibility instead of telling them how their behavior affects us and other loved ones, information that would be helpful to their soul.” Boundaries, page 101.

Remember, boundaries define who you are. When you don’t communicate your boundaries or enforce your boundaries, then you leave people confused. They don’t know who you are and they don’t know how to relate to you. Paul tells us…

“Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor....” Ephesians 4:25

Now, when you choose to speak truthfully and point out someone’s fault, I have four suggestions;

**First, assume the best.** Assume that they didn’t intend to hurt you. Most people cross your boundaries out of insensitivity or selfishness. They aren’t looking to do you harm. It’s our insecurity that makes us think the worst.

**Second, speak in love.** Pointing out a fault shouldn’t be a lecture or a sermon. It’s not a time to quote scripture. Paul said…

*Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.* Ephesians 4:29

And Proverbs says…

*Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.* Proverbs 12:18

It’s much more natural to speak out of hurt and defensiveness. But learn to hold your tongue and only speak what will move you toward resolution. Remember, you want to put water on the fire.

**Third, use “I” statements, not “you” statements.** “You” statements sound like this.

“You make me so mad. You are always late. You won’t be on time for your own funeral.”

But “I” statements sound like this…
“I was disappointed that we missed the concert. I’m really angry that this happens so often. I don’t feel like I can count on anything that we agree on.

“You” statements are accusatory and condemning while “I” statements give your offender insight into how their behavior affected you.

Fourth, include the last 10%. Too often we get up the courage to talk to someone, only to chicken out and not share the real reason that we were offended. For example, I might tell you that I’m mad that we missed the concert but never tell you how disrespected I felt. So you say you are sorry and I forgive you and we go on our way. But, deep down, I’m still mad at you and you can’t figure out why. It’s because I wasn’t totally honest. I didn’t share the last 10%. If you want to improve your relationship, you have to share everything about what offended you, not just part of it.

10. **Listen intently.** Listening well is a lot of work, isn’t it? You have to work hard at not using your listening time to reload with more arguments. But if your intention really is to “win them back”, it’s important that you hear what they are saying. Proverbs says…

   *It’s stupid and embarrassing to give an answer before you listen.* Proverbs 18:13

11. **Seek closure** (agreement). It’s not enough for me to call my neighbor and complain about his cows being in my yard and for him to say he’s sorry. That’s not closure. I’ve still got a broken down fence and a yard full of cows. There’s no closure until I look out the window and see the cows on the other side of the fence again.

   In the same way, you need to bring closure to your boundary violation otherwise you’ll only become bitter and resentful. And that’s not fair to any of your relationships. You need to make sure that your offender understands your boundary and agrees to honor it. Plus, they should agree to repair any damages that they caused.

12. **Include others.** If you aren’t able to bring closure on your own (and this might take several meetings), then you need to bring others into the equation who understand the problem. That’s why Jesus said…

   *But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses.*

   When you bring other people into the discussion, it serves two purposes; one is to show your offender that others see the same problem as you do and second is that the other people can serve as moderators to cool down and focus the discussion.

Well, that’s the process. It’s very practical. Very logical. But I wonder how many of us will commit to doing what Jesus said – resolve our conflict by going to our offender?

I want you to know that I understand how hard this is. As a pastor, I consider “relationship management” as one of my top priorities. There’s not a week that goes by that I’m not contacting someone to either ask their forgiveness or talk to them about a relationship that can use improving. I don’t like doing it. It’s hard, but that’s what it takes to keep the unity and without unity we’ll self destruct within a year. The same is true for you. Without unity, your relationships will self destruct. So you need to give them your full attention.
If you know that God is speaking to you right now to obey Matthew 18:15, I want to pray for you.

**Prayer:** Father, sometimes the simplest things are the hardest to do. We’ve talked about setting boundaries in our relationships, we’ve talked about declaring our rights but talking to people about how they’ve crossed our boundaries scares us to death. We are insecure. We are afraid. We are full of self-doubt. Father I ask that we would allow your Spirit to fill us and strengthen us to obey Jesus’ words. Give us your passion for restoring relationships. Might we not settle for anything less than what you want for us. Amen.

**Intro to communion:**

Now, the good news is that Jesus’ death not only paved the way for us to restore our relationship with God. It paved the way for us to restore our relationship with each other. Listen to how Paul describes it…

> For Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles [that is, ‘enemies’] by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us. By his death he ended the whole system of Jewish law that excluded the Gentiles. His purpose was to make peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new person from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. Ephesians 2:14-16

Did you see that last phrase? Paul said that our hostility toward each other was put to death. That’s past tense. When Jesus died on the cross he not only made it possible for us to relate to God. He made it possible for us to relate to each other. But he won’t force either relationship on us. We have to choose both – a relationship with God and a relationship with each other. He’s done everything he can to help you reconcile with your offender. Now you have to take the next steps to make that a reality. I want you to think about that as we celebrate communion right now.

**Part Five – A Closer Look at Boundaries**

**Video Skit:** A grandmother returns from a weekend of babysitting her granddaughter. The two of them recount all that happened to the girl’s mother…McDonald’s, shopping, tents in the living room, etc. Then the girl mentions that they went to church three times and prayed at every meal. The mother of the girl is upset and asks her daughter to leave so she can talk to the grandmother. It turns out that the grandmother had promised to not pray with the girl as the mother had asked. The mother was disillusioned with God and didn’t want to spread that to her daughter. But the grandmother couldn’t keep to her word. Her faith was so much a part of who she was that she couldn’t resist including her granddaughter in prayer and church.

Did you see the boundary issues there? The mother and daughter disagreed on where one person stopped and the other person started – that is – how much authority did the grandmother have during the weekend? What were her boundaries? I’ll tell you who I think was at fault here in a minute but I want to start by looking at a principle about boundaries from Paul’s words to the Galatian church. Paul said…
Brothers and sisters, what if someone is caught in a sin? Then you who are guided by the Spirit should correct that person. Do it in a gentle way. But be careful. You could be tempted too. Carry each other's heavy loads and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (love). If you think you are somebody when you are nobody, you are fooling yourselves. Each of you should put your own actions to the test. Then you can take pride in yourself. You won't be comparing yourself to somebody else. Each of you should carry your own load. Galatians 6:1-5.

Paul says two things here that might seem to contradict each other. In verse two he tells us to carry each other’s heavy loads. Then in verse five he tells us that we should carry our own load. So which is it? Should we just carry our own load or should we help carry the load of others? If everyone carries their own load, then I shouldn’t have to carry someone else’s.

Let me diagram this for you. You are responsible for two things:
1. your own load.
2. to help with the heavy load of others.

Now your own load consists of things like your happiness, emotions, future, relationships, success, mistakes/sin and resulting consequences. These are the things that everyone is responsible to handle on their own. The Bible tells us that one day we will all answer to God for how we handle our responsibilities. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10

I can’t answer for you and you can’t answer for me. So it’s very important that we are clear in regard to who is responsible for what. When we aren’t clear, that’s when we fight with each other.
The person to the left has given away half of their responsibilities to the other person. Plus they’ve taken on half of the other person’s responsibility plus their entire heavy load. This person is asking for trouble. If you diagrammed your life, would it look like this?

This is what happened with the mother and daughter in the skit. The grandmother took on the responsibility of sharing her faith with her granddaughter. That’s a great thing to do, but the grandmother had promised to not do that. She went back on her word. So, she was the boundary breaker. And boundary violations will always provoke anger. That’s why the mother got angry.

\[\text{Note:}\] The grandmother should have never agreed to her daughter’s terms. She was a “Sieve”, abandoning her right to be who she was with her granddaughter. But once she made that commitment, she needed to abide by it. She became a “Space Invader” when she broke her word. Believers often make the mistake of thinking that they have the right to do this because “they are right”. They believe their faith in God justifies sharing their faith, no matter how inappropriate it is. But they are violating people’s boundaries in a way that God never would. Their behavior is ultimately a bad reflection on God.

So, how are you at keeping and giving away responsibility? How well do you do at carrying your own load? To help you assess your boundaries I want to revisit our three friends; The Space Invader, The Sieve and The Wall. In the second message I described each boundary type but this time I want to give you more information about their sense of responsibility, what motivates them and then give you some recommendations. So let’s take a look.

**The Space Invader.**
The Space Invader is task oriented, insensitive, compulsive and impatient. They want to make things happen and can run over people in getting the job done. They feel responsible for everyone and everything.

Why are they so responsible? Because they are driven by a fear of failure. They can’t bear letting a ball drop in life because they feel that it is a personal reflection on them. They don’t want to look bad so they do everything in their power to make sure that nothing goes wrong.

If you are a space invader, like I am, our greatest challenge is to risk failure. We need to be able to say,

“I’m not going to take responsibility for that. That’s not my load. I’m not the Savior of the world. If that fails, it fails. And I’m okay with that. I’m not any less of a person. And I’m not going to feel guilty about it.”

If you have trouble saying this then you might be a space invader.

I face this challenge all the time here at church. Being a new church, there are a lot of things I want to see happen. I want to volunteer to work with the children and build that ministry. I want to get back on the move crew like I used to and give some guys a break. I want to help out in Celebrate Recovery and Divorce Care. I know that if I got involved I could help each ministry to grow.

But I also know that I can’t do it all – I have to let some things go. If that ministry is going to succeed, it’ll have to do it without me. If it can’t make it without me helping, then I need to let that ministry fail. I don’t like that. But that’s the right thing to do.
I had the same trouble when I owned my own business. I wanted it to succeed so bad it was hard for me to step back and say, “You know, if I have to work this hard to just break even, maybe it’s not meant to be.” So I finally got up the courage to risk failure and that’s exactly what happened. I had to close my business. It didn’t feel good. But it was the right thing to do.

What about you? Think about some of the things in your life that you are taking responsibility for. If you are doing it out of fear of failure, maybe you need to let it go.

**The Sieve**

The Sieve takes a different approach to responsibility. They are called The Sieve because they let people break through their boundaries all the time. They are insecure, uneasy, people pleasers who hate to say “no”. They are quick to abandon their own load and take responsibility for everyone else’s load. They are easily manipulated by guilt. And when something bad happens, they are convinced that it’s their fault and end up apologizing even when they had nothing to do with it. Unlike The Space Invader, they aren’t motivated by the fear of failure. The Sieve is motivated by the fear of rejection. They will do whatever it takes to be liked and accepted.

The Sieve also needs to take a risk. They need to risk being rejected. This week in the *Boundaries in Marriage* study we looked at a woman who was an example of a Sieve who risked being rejected. She was mad at her husband for coming home late every night. She didn’t like having to make dinner twice. But she felt it was her responsibility to do it and she didn’t want to make her husband mad.

After learning about boundaries she discovered that it wasn’t her responsibility to spend her night in the kitchen or to keep her husband happy. His happiness was *his* responsibility. So she took a risk and laid down some boundaries. She told her husband that she was going to serve supper once and if he didn’t make it home that he could warm up his portion in the microwave oven. She wasn’t angry but very matter of fact.

That was a scary thing for her because she knew that he’d get upset and she wasn’t sure that she could handle his anger or the guilt. But guess what? After he got over his anger and two weeks went by…the husband got tired of leftovers and started coming home in time for supper. When she stopped taking responsibility for her husband’s load and concentrated on her own load, their relationship improved. Maybe there are similar situations in your life where you need to focus more on owning your own load and stop caring for someone else’s load.

**The Wall**

Where both the Space Invader and the Sieve take on too much responsibility, The Wall only takes responsibility for themselves. And because of that they come across as independent, distant and aloof. They choose to just let things happen. They don’t really care what happens. They don’t want to be involved in other people’s lives.

People with The Wall boundary are often motivated by a fear of intimacy. They don’t want to get close, either because they were hurt by someone before or because they have no idea how to get close to other people. It’s embarrassing to them to admit that they are relationally challenged, so they simply choose to keep their distance.
I see this a lot in men. It’s hard for us to admit that we’ve been hurt in the past. We think men shouldn’t be bothered by stuff like that. So we don’t get the help we need. Or, if we simply don’t know how to be relational as a friend or a dad or husband, we avoid people and find other things to do that make us feel competent.

People who are Walls need to risk intimacy. What makes that hard for them is that they are very competent at living life alone and very incompetent at living live with others. They don’t see the need to include others into their world because they’ve got it so good. Everything is nice and orderly. Why let others come and mess it up? But if they are honest, they’ll admit that they are very lonely inside that wall.

If you are a Wall type person, I want to encourage you to take small steps at moving into relationship. Move out of your shell one step at a time. You don’t have to move to group hugs or cuddle parties too fast! Take your time. Start to add people to your schedule - a cup of coffee here, a lunch there. And as you meet with them work at slowly becoming more and more transparent – revealing not just what you do but who you are.

Plus, offer to help them with their heavy loads. Be willing to listen to their problems or join them on a Saturday with one of their house projects. You’ll be amazed at how these simple acts of service break down the walls of isolation and build relationship.

No Boundary
People who have no boundaries usually come from a highly abusive background. They learned that they don’t have the right to boundaries. Now, think about what it would be like to play soccer or football without boundaries or goals. All you have are some team mates and a ball. Not very exciting, right? You’d quit after a minute out of boredom. It’s the boundaries and goals that give the game it’s definition and purpose.

Now imagine life without any boundaries or goals. It’s the same thing. The person who lacks boundaries and goals gives up on life. They have no idea what to do or where to go. They aren’t motivated by anything. They are just trying to hang on from day to day. They feel immobile, powerless and needy.

From their perspective they have no control over what is happening. The slightest problem in life paralyzes them. They have no idea what to do. They are unable to take any responsibility. They might just sit at home and cry or ignore the situation all together because they can’t handle the pain of their powerlessness.

The no boundary person needs to get some serious help. In fact, these are the people that are carrying a heavy load and we need to step out of our comfort zone to move them to get the help they need. But if you choose to help them, you need to be very careful because they can overwhelm you. You can’t be their only support. One of the best things you can help them with is getting some professional counseling.

The Healthy Person
The healthy person is clear about who they are and what they are responsible for. And because of that they are confident and calm. They know that they are taking care of their load and they aren’t taking care of others inappropriately. They have a “let’s see what happens” attitude. That means they aren’t forcing their agenda on anyone and they aren’t walking away either. They stay
engaged at the right level. They aren’t motivated by fear of failure or fear of rejection or fear of intimacy but they are motivated by their love for God and their love for people.

This is the person we all want to be, isn’t it? - calm, confident and motivated to love God and others?

*How do we get healthy boundaries like this?*
Healthy boundaries are created in love when we are children. When parents give their child the love they need, that child is free to separate from them – in a good way. That’s what we call differentiation. The child learns that it’s okay to be different from their parents. They are free to become their own person because their parents convinced them of their value, giving them the confidence they need to separate.

But, on the other hand, unhealthy boundaries are created in fear. When a child is unsure of their parents love they are afraid to separate and become their own person. That’s what we see with the Space Invader, the Sieve and The Wall. Each person is motivated by fear. Each one is still looking to find the acceptance that they never got as a child. And that’s what I want you all to see this morning. I want you to realize that many of us do what we do because we are driven by fear and insecurity. Some of us may have been following Jesus for 30 years and we are still driven by fear instead of love. That shouldn’t be! You don’t have to let that keep happening.

The good news is that no matter how old you are you can still find the love you need to create healthy boundaries. It’s not too late! Your parents may not have given you what you needed but God can. The Bible says…

> All who proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God.  
> 16 We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in him. ...  
> 17 And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we are like Christ here in this world. 18 Such love has no fear because perfect love casts out all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of judgment, and this shows that his love has not been perfected in us. 1 John 4:15-18

This is telling us that when you become convinced of God’s love for you, you don’t have to live in fear and run around seeking to be accepted by others. You are free to simply be you, warts and all. That’s what happens when we are touched by God’s love. It casts out fear. It calms your heart and let’s you know that you are accepted unconditionally. And when you are free to simply be you, then you are finally able to build healthy relationships without all the baggage.

We’ll take one last look at Boundaries next week on Mother’s Day when I’ll talk about Boundaries and Children. If you aren’t in the “healthy boundary” category, I hope you’ll pick up the book *Boundaries* and give it a serious read. If you are looking to build better relationships this should definitely be at the top of your reading list. It’s one of the most helpful books I’ve read.  *(Click here to learn more about the book…)*


And if you want to join a small group to discuss the book, a new one is starting this Wednesday night in North Menomonie. This one isn’t for married couples, it’s for anyone wanting to learn more about boundaries. (contact cedarbrookchurch@wwt.net or 231-5433 to register).
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<tr>
<th>Type of Boundary</th>
<th>Nature</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Space Invader</strong></td>
<td>Inensitive, Compulsive, Impatient</td>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>Fear of Failure</td>
<td>Risk Failure</td>
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<td>“Make it happen”</td>
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<td><strong>The Sieve</strong></td>
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<td>Others only</td>
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<td><strong>The Wall</strong></td>
<td>Independent, Distant, Aloof, Self-contained</td>
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<td><strong>No Boundary</strong></td>
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**Questions & Answers**

The following are questions that people submitted for me to answer.

1. **Can you have more than one boundary type? I see myself as a Space Invader, Sieve AND Wall!**

Absolutely. The root problem with each type is a low self worth. That insecurity/fear drives you to do whatever it takes to seek acceptance or safety. But once you find your worth in God, you don’t have to resort to those tactics. You can relax, establishing your own boundaries and respecting the boundaries of others.

2. **Talk more about being the recipient of someone venting their frustrations about someone else and setting a boundary with that. How do you deal with being pulled in as the 3rd party in triangulation? (See part four of this series)**
You want to make it very clear that it is none of your business to be their sounding board. So affirm them by telling them that you appreciate their problem. But then gently confront them about telling you when they should be talking to their offender. For example, you might say, “I hear what you are saying. I’ve been in that situation and it’s really frustrating. But I’ve found that the best thing to do in that situation is go to the person I’m mad at and tell them how I feel.”

I recommend that you write out your response in advance so you have a ready reply.

3. **When someone continually crosses your boundaries, disrespecting you over and over, but always apologizes – how do I find peace?** I don’t believe in the apology any more and I want to give up on the relationship/friendship. Others have been included and it hasn’t changed anything.

First, you need to take responsibility for your peace. Your emotions are your responsibility. No one makes you mad. You choose to be mad. Don’t think that someone else has control over how you feel. Have you seen that new ad on TV that says you are the CEO of your healthcare? They are implying that you should make the decisions and not be subject to someone else. The same is true here. You are the CEO of your emotions. So don’t play the victim. Take control.

Next, put some space between you and your friend. The book, *Boundaries*, talks about the Law of Sowing and Reaping. The person who sows disrespect needs to learn that they will reap isolation. They shouldn’t be able to habitually cross your boundaries and still reap your love and affection. They need to see the cause and effect relationship between their irresponsibility and isolation. It’s only fair that you expect more than an apology. Your friend needs to rebuild trust with you and trust is more than words. It’s actions. When John the Baptist told the Pharisees to repent he added that they needed to “bring fruit in keeping with repentance.” (Matthew 3). That means that they need to not just talk about change but actually back their talk up with lifestyle changes.

Third, communicate and enforce consequences. Remember, boundaries without consequences aren’t boundaries, they are mere suggestions. You may even need to end the relationship all together.

Fourth, grieve the loss of what is not and may never be. It sounds like you have hung on this long because you had hopes of this relationship going somewhere. You are having trouble letting go because you don’t want to give up. But it sounds like it’s over – you just haven’t been able to accept it. So accept it and grieve the loss. You need to bring closure.

Finally, ask your support group to hold you accountable. It’s easy to waffle on relationships, especially if you are a Sieve. Don’t let that happen. You are only hurting yourself.

4. **How can you forgive your family members when they have run over your boundaries and caused great pain?**

In my class on forgiveness I tell people that one of the first steps is to set boundaries so you are not continually offended. It’s very hard to forgive as long as your boundaries are being crossed on a regular basis. Do what you have to do to separate yourself from the abuse so you can finally think straight and make healthy choices. Once you are in that place, then you can start the process of forgiving.
In regard to forgiveness, remember that forgiveness is never earned. It’s a gift. So it doesn’t matter how often or how horrible the offense was. What matters is that you make the choice to release your family from retaliation. Forgiveness is choosing to give up the right to get even. It doesn’t mean that you have to be their buddies. It just means that you won’t live with bitterness in your heart toward them. You put the past in the past and move on.

5. **How do I get my spouse to engage with me at the level I want him to?**

I hear this question all the time. The truth is you can’t engage your spouse if he doesn’t want to be engaged. Boundaries aren’t a form of manipulation. In fact boundaries release people to be who they want to be.

What’s important for you is that you take responsibility for how YOU engage with him. So, don’t nag or beg for him to engage. You need to give up the idea that you can control your husband’s behavior with these tactics. He has a right to ignore you. It’s not right for him to do that. But he does have the right. Rather than nag or beg, communicate honestly what your needs and expectations are for the marriage. That’s only fair. Be as calm and rational as you possibly can. It’s fair to ask for his engagement. After all, marriage is more than co-habitation. When you get married you die to your independent life and choose to prefer your new relationship over your independence. You are now a team and as a team member you have to be in regular communication with your teammate about how you can improve the relationship and fulfill your purpose in life as a couple.

Next, refuse to let his actions control your emotions/moods. Remember, you are the CEO of your emotions. (see above). Learn to love him for who he is not for who you want him to be. Set boundaries with consequences. If he chooses to stay disengaged then I would follow his lead. I would function more and more independently to show him the consequences of his decision.

Pray for him. Ask God to work in his heart. And finally, develop a network of female friends that can be your emotional support even if your husband isn’t.

6. **I struggle most with people who are "Sieves" because it seems that no matter how careful I am with them I always end up being a "Space Invader" in those relationships... even though I try so hard to be careful. How do I keep from offending them?**

I’ve got four recommendations based on my personal experience as a space invader.

- **Become a good listener.** People communicate their boundaries verbally if you listen. You may have to read between the lines but they are sending out signals regarding what’s important to them.

- **Become a good observer of non-verbal cues.** Even more than verbal cues, start noticing facial expressions, hesitations in speech, nervous ticks, etc. These too are messages about their comfort level.

- **Learn to ask permission.** I hear myself asking permission now all the time. “Would you mind if I play the music?” “Would you like me to pray for you or would that make you uncomfortable?” “Can I repeat what you told me to others?” Every time you ask permission you are validating the worth of the person you are talking to. Plus it is like a
survey. You are learning something new about that person that you can use over and over in your relationship with them.

- **Learn to ask forgiveness.** No one is perfect. You will undoubtedly invade more space. So learn to be quick to ask forgiveness for your offenses.

Feel free to email me your boundary question at remy@cedarbrookchurch.net

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**Part Six: Boundaries in Children**

**Video Interview:** A mother of two tells of how her hurried life has put her at the center of her family where she expects everyone to march to her orders. Her “to do” list is her god and her daily planner, her bible. She finds herself saying “yes” to other people in order to show them what a good Christian she is. In the end she realizes how mixed-up her priorities are.

Does that look all too familiar? Sometimes in the rush of life, we lose sight of our purpose – especially as parents. This mother was so busy keeping other people happy that her children became just another job on her “to do” list. She lost sight of her role as mother.

In the book, “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” Stephen Covey mentions that one of the habits we should all learn is to “begin with the end in mind”. In other words, before we start any work, we should have a clear picture of our goal. That’s true for parents as well. The authors of the book, Boundaries with Kids say…

“…one goal of parenting is to keep an eye on the future. We are raising children to be responsible adults…Parenting has to do with more than the present. You are preparing your child for the future. A person’s character is one’s destiny.” Boundaries with Kids, page 14

*A person’s character is one’s destiny.* That means that for parents, their job is not merely to give their child food and clothing or to get them from band rehearsal to soccer practice on time. Their job is to take an active role in the development of their child’s character. They need to keep a picture in their mind of what they want their child to look like when they send them off as an adult and then always work to that end.

What does a person with character look like? Listen to this definition…

“Character refers to a person’s ability and inability, his moral makeup, his functioning in relationship, and how he does tasks. What does he do in certain situations, and how does he do it? When he needs to perform, how will he meet those demands? Can he love? Can he be responsible? Can he have empathy for others? Can he develop his talents? Can he solve problems? Can he deal with failure? How does he reflect the image of God? These are a few of the issues that define character.” Page 15 Boundaries in Kids

If building character is a parent’s goal, then how do they do it? That sounds like a superhuman task. But as complicated as it sounds, I think we build character in children the same way God builds character in us. The Bible gives a simple formula for building character;

**Character = Bonding + Boundaries.**
When parents bond with their children and help them set boundaries in their lives, they develop godly character. Let me unpack this equation for you in more detail by comparing how God parents us with how parents should raise their children.

First of all, the Bible tells us that when we believe in Jesus and choose to follow him, we become God’s child. 

_To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—_ John 1:12

It’s at this moment that we become the object of God’s parenting. And as God’s child, he wants to build godly character within us. Listen to what Peter told the church…

_His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness … he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature …_ 2 Peter 1:3

When Peter talks about godliness and participating in the divine nature, he is talking about developing character. He continues…

_For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love._ 2 Peter 1:4-8

God wants to reproduce in us goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness and kindness. Too often people come to God and merely want his love. They aren’t interested in being changed. But that’s what God has in mind for every one of us. God’s children need to mature to resemble their Father. So how does develop our character? - _through bonding and boundaries_. Let’s look at bonding first.

**Bonding**

With children and their parents, the bonding process begins right after birth when the baby is placed in the mother’s arms. Through this the child gains the sense of safety and security. As the child grows the bond is strengthened through different acts of love; the parents tuck them in at night, they look them in the eye and listen to their stories at meal times, they comfort their pain and wipe their tears and they encourage them when their child is afraid. Plus, the parent shows up when the principal calls or even worse, the police - about their child’s misbehavior. All of these communicate love to a child and helps develop a bond with them.

Bonding has to do with making a solid connection. It has to do with convincing a child that they are loved unconditionally – that there’s nothing they can do that will separate them from the love of their parent. One psychologist says…

_“The best way to define bonding at its core is to say that when I am bonded, I “matter” to someone. When we are bonded to another person, we feel that we make a difference to him, that our presence is desired when we are around and missed when we are absent. This sense of “mattering” is in direct contrast to feeling overlooked, forgotten, or even simply tolerated.”_ Secrets of the Family Tree, page 148.
I’ve been talking about a parent and child but the same is true between God and us. God knows how important bonding is, that’s why the Bible is full of God telling us how committed he is to us.

*The LORD your God will … neither fail you nor forsake you.* Deuteronomy 31:6

*Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for a child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you!* See, I have written your name on my hand. Isaiah 49: 15,16

I love the thought of my name being on his hand. Ever time he checks his watch he thinks of me!

*My sheep recognize my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. So no one can take them from me.* John 10:27-29

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? …I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Romans 8:31-39

The Bible is emphatic…God’s love is unconditional. We matter to God. He desires our presence and he misses us when we are absent. Do you believe that? I do. When I’m not tracking with God I think he senses it. The world isn’t quite right and he says to himself, “Something’s wrong today…oh yeah, Remy’s dropped off the radar. I hope he gets back on track with Me.” He feels the same way about you too.

Plus, God didn’t just *tell* us about his love, he *showed* us.

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Romans 5:8

*God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.* Romans 5:5

In the same way, parents need to demonstrate their love for their children. Children have to be convinced, beyond a shadow of a doubt- that their parents are for them and not against them – that they love them, no matter what they’ve done – and that there’s nothing that will cause their parents to turn their back on them.

But bonding isn’t as natural as it might seem. The cares of our busy life quickly distract us and it’s easy to communicate the wrong message to our kids.

In a survey of hundreds of children, one researcher (Delmer Holbrook) came up with the top three responses that fathers’ give their children’s requests to do something. The number one response? "I'm too tired". Second place: "*We don’t have enough money*" And third place: "*Keep quiet*". These statements are the opposite of bonding.
Or listen to this. One time a reporter from the New York Times interviewed Marilyn Monroe. The reporter knew that during her early years Marilyn had been shuffled from one foster home to another. So the reporter asked her, "Did you ever feel loved by any of the foster families with whom you lived?" Marilyn replied, "Once, when I was about seven or eight. The woman I was living with was putting on makeup, and I was watching her. She was in a happy mood, so she reached over and patted my cheeks with her rouge puff…For that moment, I felt loved by her."

Marilyn Monroe was a success as a movie star but failed in life. After three broken marriages, she died of a drug overdose at the age of 36. I have to wonder if her death didn’t ultimately come from her never having bonded with anyone.

But bonding alone doesn’t produce character in a child. In fact, bonding, by itself, produces spoiled, self-centered children. I watched Nanny 911 last week - it’s a great show that’s all about boundaries and children - and the parents were well bonded to their children. But that family was in crisis. The parents had totally lost control of their two boys.

The parents loved them very much - so much that they never wanted to make them unhappy. Whatever their boys wanted they gave them. When they couldn’t sleep at night their parents climbed into bed with them until they fell asleep. But when the Nanny arrived, she knew exactly what to do. She went right to work at establishing boundaries for both the parents and the boys. And this is the second part of our character equation: boundaries. Character = Bonding + Boundaries.

What are boundaries?
Boundaries are.. “knowing what you are responsible for and knowing what you are not responsible for, knowing how to say “no” and knowing how to accept the “no” of others.”

Again, from the book Boundaries with Kids, it says that…
“Children are not born with boundaries. They internalize boundaries from external relationships and discipline. In order for children to learn who they are and what they are responsible for, their parents have to have clear boundaries with them and relate to them in ways that help them learn their own boundaries.” Boundaries with Kids, page 18

Think about this: when a child is first born, the child has no responsibilities and the parents have them all. Over the next eighteen years or so, it’s the parent’s job to transfer all of the responsibility over to their child so that when the child moves away, they are totally responsible for themselves and the parent is only a consultant with no direct responsibility.

It’s this transfer of responsibility where boundaries are formed. The child develops a sense of who they are and who they aren’t – what they are responsible for and what they are not responsible for. Bonding gives the child a sense of security but it’s the boundaries that give the child a sense of identity and purpose.

The same thing happens spiritually. When we first turn our lives over to God we bond with him. The Bible tells us that “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by God’s Spirit” (Romans 5:5) but we have no spiritual boundaries. Some Christians like it that way. They want to know God’s love but they have no interest in sharing his character. That’s why you can have a twenty year believer who is still only a “baby Christian” because they never allowed God to add
boundaries to their bonding – and as a result, they have no character. But God wants to impart his boundaries to us through the process of teaching or what the Bible calls ‘discipline’. The Bible puts it this way…

[We train ourselves]… to recognize the difference between right and wrong and then do what is right. Hebrews 5:12-14

All through out the Bible God tells us who we ought to be and what we are responsible to do. The Ten Commandments are the most obvious example but there are countless other Bible passages that instruct us. Like a wise parent, God rewards our obedience and he meets our disobedience with consequences. But negative consequences aren’t a sign of God abandoning us. They are, in fact, a sign of God’s love. That’s what the book of Hebrews is getting at when it says…

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Hebrews 12:7,8

And just as God disciplines us, we are to, in turn, discipline our children…

To discipline and reprimand a child produces wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by an undisciplined child. Proverbs 29:15

Teach your children to choose the right path, and when they are older, they will remain upon it. Proverbs 22:6

**Boundaries**

But how, exactly, do we impart boundaries? We impart boundaries by teaching children to understand the word “no”.

1. **Teach children to respect the ‘no’ of others.**

When children hear the word ‘no’, too often what they hear their parents say is ‘well, maybe, if you ask a lot more and a lot louder’. But parents, don’t let your children get away with that! That’s where consequences come in. Proverbs says…

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him. Pr. 22:15

Sometimes spanking might be an appropriate consequence but there are other creative ways to offer discipline. The word ‘discipline’ means “to teach”. So, we aren’t talking about punishing. We are talking about teaching.

If children don’t listen to your ‘no’, you don’t have to get in a power struggle. You can just start taking away their privileges. Or, maybe you can simply offer an alternative to their idea. For example, if you bring your kids over to my house and they start throwing a ball around our living room, I won’t yell at them but I’ll ask them to stop and take them downstairs and show them our foosball table. I was able to help them to respect my ‘no’ by giving them options.

The point is that a parent needs to teach their child to respect the requests of others. That’s a part of building their character. The child that learns to respect the ‘no’ of others becomes an adult that is sensitive, compassionate and loving.

2. **Teach children to say ‘no’ to themselves.**
The child who can’t say ‘no’ to themselves is the child that has to have what they want, when they want it. They are never satisfied with what they have. They are always looking for something new or getting more of what they already have. And when these children grow up they are prime candidates for addictions. Ask any alcoholic what their biggest downfall is and many of them will say it’s their inability to wait. They need instant gratification.

In the Bible, David’s son Solomon, was known for his lack of self-control. He couldn’t find it in himself to say “no” to himself. He had 300 wives and 700 concubines. He obviously had some self-control issues but he was the king’s son, so people let him do what he wanted. (Maybe there are areas in your life where you are doing the same?)

When Solomon reflected on his life he said…

“I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them…I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired…harem as well as the delights of the heart of man…I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.” Ecclesiastes 2:4-10

And did all of those things satisfy him? No, he said…

“Everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.” (2:11)

A wise parent will teach their child to set limits by learning to say ‘no’ to themselves. And when they grow up they’ll be people of self-control, patience and perseverance.

3. Teach children to say ‘no’ to others.
I saved this point until last because I think it’s the most overlooked of the three. If parents want their children to have the courage to “just say no” to their friends who want them to do something immoral or illegal, then parents have to teach their children to feel comfortable saying ‘no’ in their own home. In other words, your have to first teach your child to say “no” in a safe environment before they will have the confidence to say “no” in an unsafe environment.

But what do parents say when children are two years old and they start using the word ‘no’? They call it the “terrible twos” and some of them might spiritualize their behavior by saying that they are “expressing their sin nature”.

That’s not true at all. Children are simply expressing their human nature. They use the word ‘no’ as a way to differentiate themselves from their parents. It’s a natural thing. It’s a good thing. But if a parent gets mad at their child for using the word ‘no’ the child will learn that it’s not okay to be a separate individual. They’ll learn that if they want to keep mom and dad happy, they have to think like them and feel like them and act like them.

Between services this morning I saw a mother and her two year old get out of their car. The mom reached out to grab the child’s hand and the child pulled away from her. Was he being “naughty”? No, he just wanted to be a “big boy.” A mom can respond in two ways. She can tell her son that “Mommy is very sad that you don’t want to hold my hand, especially on Mother’s Day.” Or, she can say, “Wow, I’m so impressed! You are such a big boy!” Her son was saying “no” to her. But he wasn’t rebellious. He was merely experimenting with the idea of separation. How his mom responds in that moment is going to tell him a lot about himself; who
he is and who he’s not - what he’s responsible for and what his mom is responsible for. He was starting to form a boundary.

Let me give you another example. Imagine you are a parent of a four year old and it’s supper time. You get half way through the meal and Johnny decides he doesn’t want to eat. What do you do? Do you yell at him? Do you force food into his mouth? Do you threaten him or spank him?

Here’s a suggestion. In a calm voice say, “Fine. You don’t have to eat supper. But before you decide to not eat, I want you to know that that this is supper time and there won’t be any more food served until breakfast.”

Don’t dig in your heels and make it a power struggle. Consequences are God’s gift to parents so let them do the work for you. Johnny is going to hit this offer like a hungry walleye striking a lure! He doesn’t like the idea of not eating tonight but the chance at freedom is too much to resist. So he bites and happily sits through dinner, elating in his new sense of “otherness” from his parents.

Of course, you know what happens at 8:00 p.m. Johnny comes out and asks for his supper! You don’t have to tell him how stupid he is or “I told you so”. In fact, you can empathize with him. Tell him how bad you feel that he made that decision and how sorry you are that his tummy hurts. But don’t fold! Keep to the deal. Calmly remind him that supper time is over and you’ll be serving again in the morning.

Johnny might throw another fit, but then you simply usher him to his room and tell him that he is free to throw a fit but not in your presence. You have the right to a peaceful evening and he doesn’t have the right to ruin it with his inappropriate pity-party. When he can talk to you in a normal voice you will be happy to listen. Be careful not to communicate that his fit is causing you to break your bond with him. Make it clear that you love him and respect his choices. You aren’t punishing him, you are simply making him abide by house rules.

By doing this, you affirm his right to say ‘no’ and you maintained your bond. You didn’t reject him. Too often parents make the mistake of distancing themselves from their child when their child expresses a thought, emotion or desire that they don’t like. That really messes with the child because they don’t want to lose their parents love so they’ll often comply just to keep the parent happy. If they do that over and over, they are being trained to take responsibility for the happiness of others. Then, when they grow up and their friends ask them to do something immoral or illegal or just plain stupid, they are going to have a tough time saying ‘no’ because they’ve learned that it’s their responsibility to keep others happy. But if mom and dad give them the freedom to disagree and say ‘no’ to them, then the child will develop a strong sense of self-worth and be a person of honesty and integrity.

For those of you that are parents or parents to be, I hope you’ll take these things to heart and consider how you might build character in the lives of your children. Character is developed by bonding with your child and establishing boundaries.

Before I close, I want to address those of us who are parents of grown children. I was talking to a friend this week who read a book on parenting and when he got to the end he was all depressed because the book only reminded him of all of his parenting mistakes. And I’ve got to confess that
in developing this message I had my own share of regrets. That last point about not respecting my kid’s thoughts and emotions is where I’m really guilty.

So, if you are like me or my friend, I want to remind you of God’s forgiveness. Parenting sins are forgivable just like other sins. Jesus died for those errors just like all the others. I also want to remind you that your failure can be God’s opportunity to move in your child’s life. God often reveals himself in our weakness. If you were the perfect parent you might have the perfect child and the perfect child might not realize how much they need God. So don’t beat yourself up! Talk to your kids about your mistakes, ask forgiveness if you need to, and ask God to use your mistakes to draw your children closer to him.

**Prayer:** Father, thanks for being a great parent to us. Thank you that you have made your love plain by bonding with us and giving us boundaries. In the same way, I pray for parents here to follow your example. Help them to be passionate about developing the character of their child in the same way. And for those of us that regret how we parented our children, help us to find your forgiveness and the forgiveness of our children. Thank you that you can take our failure and seize it as an opportunity to work in our children’s live for good.. Amen.