BOTTOM LINE: GOD WANTS YOU TO SET UP SOME PROTECTIVE BARRIERS TO KEEP YOU OUT OF THE DANGER ZONE.

INTRODUCTION
Guardrails are part of our every day experience. Whether we are walking, biking or driving there are guardrails all around us to protect us from those off-limit areas—areas where we could drop off the edge or crash into something. But where are the guardrails in our actual, everyday lives? We have to establish those personal guardrails ourselves so that we can back up and stay on the safe side of a potentially dangerous situation.

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ABOUT GOD
God is the one and only true God, yet He exists in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. God is the Creator, so everything belongs to Him and is under His control. God is holy, so He is righteous, majestic and loving. God is all knowing and purposeful, so He’s at work to bring about His will. No person, thing or idea compares to God.

ABOUT THE SCRIPTURES
God reveals Himself to us through the Bible, and it is 100% accurate, reliable and authoritative.

ABOUT PEOPLE
People are made in God’s image and for His pleasure. But everybody falls short of God’s intention, or ideal, for people. In other words, everyone has sinned. As a result, we are all separated from Him, even though He wants an intimate relationship with each of us.

ABOUT SALVATION
That’s why Jesus, God’s Son, came and lived on this earth, died and rose again. God offers His free gift of salvation to all who believe in Jesus and accept Him as Savior, the only way to be forgiven and reconciled to God. Anyone who accepts this gift is adopted as a son or daughter into God’s family and will live with Him forever in heaven.
We believe that the set, stage, music and everything in your room communicates a message—without you saying a word. That's why we put together a list of production ideas to help you set the stage for the session and the series. From the music you play when students come in the room to the worship set your band plays, we want to make sure that your room conveys “Guardrails” in a multi-sensory way. There is a downloadable checklist available in your series downloads that will give you all the elements for this session (and the entire series).

**BACKGROUND PLAYLIST FOR GUARDRAILS SERIES**

“We Didn’t Start the Fire” by Billy Joel (from *Storm Front*)
“Who Says” by Selena Gomez (from *Who Says*)
“Sweet Serendipity” by Lee Dewyze (from *Live it Up*)
“Something to Believe In” by Parachute (from *Something to Believe in*)
“I Just Wanna Run” by The Downtown Fiction (from *Best I Ever Had*)
“The Light Will Come” by Phil Wickham (from *Cannons*)
“Should’ve Said No” by Taylor Swift (from *Taylor Swift*)
“If It’s Love” by Train (from *Save Me, San Francisco*)
“Hold My Hand” by Michael Jackson featuring Akon (from *Michael*)
“I Run to You” by Lady Antebellum (from *Lady Antebellum*)
“Otherside” by MIKESCHAIR (from *MIKESCHAIR*)

**WORSHIP PLAYLIST FOR GUARDRAILS SESSION 1**

“Save Me from Myself” by Carpark North (from *Lost*)
“You” by Hillsong Live (from *A Beautiful Exchange*)
“Where the Spirit of the Lord Is” by Chris Tomlin (from *And If Our God Is for Us, Deluxe Edition*)
“Live for You” by Connersvine (from *Connersvine*)
“From the Inside Out” by Hillsong Live (from *Mighty to Save*)

**THE SET**

Contact your county’s Department of Transportation to find out if you can get a hold of actual road guardrails to use on your set. If this isn’t feasible, you can go to a local salvage yard and see if you can find any there. You can also do a search on craigslist.com. Set up your guardrails on either side of the stage. Using yellow construction paper (or traffic tape, which you can find online) make cut outs of yellow squares to run down the middle of your room and up on to the stage to make your room into one big street. You can also get old car parts (lights, bumpers, fenders—the older and more beat up, the better) and put them on the inside of the guardrails. Make sure that somewhere within your set you incorporate the word “Guardrails”, like on a screen or monitor. Or you can use the traffic tape from the floor design to write the word “Guardrails” on the background of your stage.

**SERIES ART**

Art for PowerPoint backgrounds and for series promotional ads is available as a free download with every series. Visit the XP3 website, log on to your account and download the images to use in your presentation, newsletters and website.

**VIDEO**

A video bumper is available for the Guardrails series and was created to be used as an intro for all three sessions of the Guardrails series. You can purchase the video by logging into your XP3 account and clicking on the “XP3 videos” link.
The following activities and illustrations will help middle school students connect with the subject matter in ways that engage them physically, mentally, socially and sometimes emotionally. You can also adapt the Guardrails series for middle school students by using the teaching outline found in this document to edit the teaching script into a 20-minute presentation. In addition, by using the separate middle school small group dialog questions (found in the series downloads) that are geared specifically for sixth to eighth graders, you can make each section more middle school friendly.

**SESSION 1 GAME: LIFE SIZE BATTLESHIP** *(Play this game as an icebreaker to Session 1.)*

Split your group into two teams. Set up the room with a divider down the middle (like a curtain or a bed sheet hung on rods or from the ceiling) and play “Life-Size Battleship.” Have people lie down on the floor like battleships and use a beach ball as the bomb. One person from each group is the designated thrower and their job is to throw the ball over the sheet, trying to get a direct hit. If the ball hits someone’s body, their ship sinks. The object of the game is to sink all of the ships from the opposing team.

**SESSION 1 ILLUSTRATION: OVER THE EDGE!** *(Use this illustration after teaching point “A” in the Tension section of the teaching script.)*

Set up a path for your students with guardrails on either side. You can do this by setting up chairs on either side of the “path” and stringing toilet paper through them to make a boundary, or get creative and make some guardrails with “Danger,” “Steep Cliff” and other road signs along the path. Have some of your adult volunteers stand outside the guardrails with silly string and squirt bottles. If you have time, you can make T-shirts for your volunteers to wear with some danger areas written on them (such as “broken family trust,” “painful romantic relationship” and “bad friendship choices”). This could be done quickly and inexpensively by writing on white T-shirts with permanent marker.

Make sure you leave some breaks in the guardrails along the path with something to entice them off the edge, such as donuts or candy. Have each of your students walk through the path, and tell them that when there is a break in the guardrail, they have the choice to walk off the path into the danger zone to get what they want. When they do, have your volunteers ready to squirt them, spray them with silly string or dish out any other annoying (but safe) “consequences.” If you have room, you can set up some curtains (maybe using the same ones you used for Life-Size Battleship) so your students can’t see what’s coming and other students don’t know what’s going to happen by watching their peers. The more creative you can get with this, the better you will be able to show your students how guardrails keep them out of dangerous areas so they can move toward their goals.
The teaching script is divided into five sections.

INTRODUCTION
This introduction is intended to connect you, the communicator, to the audience usually through a personal story or observation. We’ve included our stories, but you may want to substitute your own story in this section.

TENSION
The tension moves the message from the “me” mentality of the introduction to a “we” mentality. For example, a transition statement might be, “At some point in our lives, we have all been jealous of someone over something.”

TRUTH
Once the tension builds, the next logical step is to uncover the truth of what the Bible says about the topic.

APPLICATION
At this point, the message moves to a “you” mentality in order to teach the application. The “you” is the student. Take God’s truth and unpack how it relates to each student so that he or she can apply it to everyday life.

LANDING
Here it is important to land the message on what each student needs to know and do with what they’ve heard. Just as the message began with a personal story or observation, the message also ends with a “me” mentality. For example, one possible landing statement might be, “I have a greater sense of purpose knowing that God created me in His image.” Leave the students with a clear sense of what all of you should do with what you’ve heard.
BOTTOM LINE: GOD WANTS YOU TO SET UP SOME PROTECTIVE BARRIERS TO KEEP YOU OUT OF THE DANGER ZONE.

INTRODUCTION
A guardrail is designed to keep vehicles from straying into dangerous or off-limit areas.

The point of a guardrail is to say the place beyond the guardrail is a point of danger.

TENSION
Your greatest regret relationally, your greatest regret morally, your greatest regret ethically—whether past or yet to come—could have been avoided.

Having these guardrails should serve as a warning.

TRUTH
Be very careful, then, how you live (Ephesians 5:15 NIV).

Not as unwise but as wise making the most of every opportunity (Ephesians 5:15-16 NIV).

Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is (Ephesians 5:17 NIV).

APPLICATION
Our tendency is to play as close to the line as possible.

“How close can I get without sinning?”

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery (Ephesians 5:18 NIV).

Anything that leads us to a loss of control, your heavenly Father is against.

Instead, be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18 NIV).

You need personal standards that become a matter of conscience, that keep you from a loss of control.

LANDING
What would it look like to back up to someplace safe and put a guardrail in the ground that maybe none of your buddies ever understand but may be the thing God uses to rescue you?

No one has ever regretted establishing a guardrail.
Plenty of people wish they had established guardrails.
HOW TO CONTEXTUALIZE A TEACHING SCRIPT

The XP3 Students Team wants you to take our work and make it work within the context of your current student ministry. We encourage you to tailor an XP3 Students Teaching Script so that it directly speaks to your current church context, allows for the master teacher’s personality to shine in and through the message and parallels the personal world and community of your students.

HOW TO DETERMINE THE LANDSCAPE OF YOUR YOUTH GROUP

• Who are the student clusters in your ministry?
Typically a student cluster is a homogeneous group of 5-10 students who act, behave, talk and dress the same. Understand what they love to do, eat, listen to and watch. What type of student clusters gather at your church (athletes, artistic types, Emo, etc.)? How many different student clusters come to your church? What student clusters will you initially target when you teach?

• Identify your youth ministry distinctive.
What makes your youth group different? What does your youth group tend to focus on? What does your youth group do well? What traditions are a part of your youth group (baptism, communion, weekly dinner)? What makes your youth group remarkable? What does your youth group offer?

HOW CAN EVERY XP3 STUDENTS BOTTOM LINE CONNECT WITH THE MISSION, UNIQUENESS AND VALUES OF YOUR STUDENT MINISTRY?

HOW TO FIND YOUR OWN VOICE: THE MASTER TEACHER’S STYLE

1. Embrace your uniqueness. God made you. Be yourself! Don’t try to pretend to be Andy Stanley or Reggie Joiner or Jared Herd when you teach. Your students need you to be you.
2. Know your strengths and weaknesses as a speaker. Have a few of your adult volunteers give you constructive feedback on your delivery.
3. Tell your own stories. Rely on your experience in order to personalize the message. Allow your students to get to know you through your storytelling.
4. Pray and be confident. Thankfully God gave us His Holy Spirit to empower all ministers of the gospel. God doesn’t leave His communicators alone on stage.

HOW TO SPEAK TO THE STUDENTS’ REAL NEEDS: THE STUDENTS’ SOCIAL SCENE

1. Define the top issues that are transpiring in your student ministry.
   a) Think through the five social areas students live in: family, school, church, friends and extracurricular activities (sports, theater, clubs, band, etc.).
   b) Observe, talk to and survey students. They will tell you their needs.
   c) Feel free to cruise social media in order to gain an understanding of their world.
2. Directly speak to students’ needs by adapting the Application and Landing sections of the teaching script. It may be more productive to deal contextually with your students’ needs rather than sticking to the script verbatim. Granted, your students will deal with application in small group, but it is helpful to at least speak to their real needs from the stage. Speaking generally about their issues helps them process faster when asked in small group.
3. Highlight top issues in the Tension section of the teaching script. It can be helpful to add to the tension by using current issues your youth ministry is experiencing.
BOTTOM LINE: GOD WANTS YOU TO SET UP SOME PROTECTIVE BARRIERS TO KEEP YOU OUT OF THE DANGER ZONE.

INTRODUCTION
A. Everybody probably knows what a guardrail is, but you may not know the actual definition of the word. A guardrail is actually a system designed to keep vehicles from straying into dangerous or off-limit areas. The official definition is: “a strong fence at the side of a road or in the middle of an expressway intended to reduce the risk of serious accidents.” Don’t you feel smarter now?

Nobody pays attention to guardrails unless they need them. Guardrails are that invisible part of our driving experience. We’re glad they’re there when we need them, but for the most part we pay no attention to them.

You generally find guardrails in one of three areas. You find them on bridges—because on a bridge there’s very little room for a mistake. You also find them in medians to keep you out of areas where people are driving in the opposite direction—which means towards you. The closer we are to people moving in the opposite direction, the more we need protection. And the third area where you find guardrails is on curves—places where there are unexpected changes in roadside conditions.

B. Now the really interesting thing about guardrails is that, generally speaking, guardrails are not actually located in the most dangerous part of the road. If you think about it, many times guardrails are usually located and constructed in areas where you can actually drive. The point of a guardrail isn’t to say, “Don’t drive in this particular place.” The point is to say that the place beyond the guardrail is a point of danger—whether that’s bridges, oncoming traffic or curves. So, generally speaking, guardrails are actually constructed in areas where theoretically you could drive, but driving in those areas would be dangerous.

C. In other words, you aren’t going to hear someone say, “Hey, I don’t know why they put guardrails on the edge of that bridge. They need to take the guardrail off because I could actually drive closer to the edge of the bridge if they would just move the silly guardrail.” And the reason we won’t hear someone say that is because we understand that in driving there needs to be some room for error. The theory behind a guardrail is that you will do less damage to your body and even, in some cases, less damage to your car, if you hit a guardrail than if you hit what was on the other side of the guardrail or went off the side of the road. It’s better to hit a guardrail and cause a little bit of damage than to cause a lot of damage to your physical body or your car because the guardrail wasn’t there.

TENSION
A. What we’re going to do for the next few weeks is talk about this whole idea of guardrails—not as they relate to driving, but to other areas of our lives. After all, not all of you are driving, and, when I think about some of you driving that makes me very thankful. But the reason we are going to talk about guardrails is because your greatest regret relationally, your greatest regret morally, your greatest regret ethically could have been avoided. That relational ditch you went into, that moral cliff you went off of, could probably have been avoided and would probably have been avoided if you had put up some guardrails in your life. If that hasn’t happened yet, if you don’t have serious regret in those areas of your life, you can avoid it with some guardrails.
B. So we want to take this very common imagery of a guardrail and apply it to several areas of life. Here’s the new definition of a guardrail: We’re going to talk about a guardrail as a standard of behavior, a personal standard of behavior that you commit to.

Basically I’m going to encourage you, as we talk about relationships, friendships and sex, to think through and develop a personalized standard of behavior you value so much that it becomes a matter of right and wrong to you. In other words, what I want you to do is develop a matter of conscience—meaning that you think in terms of standards of behavior or behavioral practices that you are so committed to as an individual that violating them bothers your conscience and makes you feel like you have actually done something wrong. These would be like personal guardrails, a personal standard of behavior that informs, energizes or ignites your conscience. And the idea is that as you begin to bump up against these guardrails, internally little warning lights go on, red flags wave and there is something in you that says, “Danger! Danger! Danger!” Having these guardrails should serve as a warning that you’re bumping up against something that could lead you into trouble.

C. What’s interesting is that in our world there are things that pretty much everybody agrees are bad. And as a result, in our culture, in marketing and advertising, we get some messages that are sort of the culture’s way of developing guardrails—but they’re very weak. One of the ones we often see has to do with teens and sex. And it isn’t necessarily bad for culture to try to create a guardrail in this area, but oftentimes these guardrails are so weak that they are not helpful. Everybody in culture knows that somewhere on the other side of the guardrail sexually, there’s danger involved for teenagers. We’re not sure what it is, but we know being over there on the other side of the guardrail is a bad thing. The message of culture is, “Don’t have sex until you’re ready.” Now can you even imagine how that conversation might go? “Are you ready?” “I think so.” “Well, I feel like I was born ready. When do you think you’ll be ready?” “I think in about three weeks.” “Well, let’s mark it on the calendar.”

On the surface, it may sound reasonable to say, “Wait until you’re ready.” But let’s be honest, that’s not a guardrail. That’s the equivalent of a little yellow line painted on a curvy road up in the mountains somewhere.

D. Our culture—and this is where the challenge will be for you and me—our culture does not appreciate guardrails when it comes to lots of different areas. This is why, if the culture comes up with anything even close to a guardrail, it ends up being really weak. Our culture thinks guardrails are stupid. In fact, for the most part, our culture thinks this is the problem with religion: Religious people are all about these silly rules and these silly guardrails and these silly barriers, and it’s stupid. But these very same people would agree that somewhere on the other side of those silly guardrails is some bad stuff that you really should be careful with and even avoid.

So as we talk about these things, there may be something that rises up within you that says, “That’s too something, and I don’t know the word for it but I know it’s something I don’t like.” If you have a religious background you might say that’s too legalistic. Or you may say that’s too confining or that’s too restrictive, but at the same time we all know that somewhere on the other side of these boundaries—or limits or guardrails—there’s some bad stuff, whether it’s sexual, moral or ethical.
And so we’re going to establish some personal standards of behavior that inform our conscience. And when you have these guardrails in place and you bump up against some behaviors that don’t seem to bother anybody else in your group of friends or your school or the world that you live in, you will find that they begin to bother you because you have some personal standards that have become a matter of conscience.

E. Maybe you have seen this sort of thing start to happen in your family as your parents establish rules and boundaries with you. They are trying to make sure those boundaries they put in place, the ones that feel so strict and so overprotective—and maybe even a little ridiculous—are far away from the edge of the abyss, from the really dangerous stuff. And when those guardrails are in place, if you have a conflict, then you’re going to have a little-bitty wreck that happens with a guardrail as opposed to going over a cliff from which people sometimes never return. Here’s the cool thing—this idea is all over the Bible. All over the Old and New Testaments we see the picture of a God who loves you and has invited you to talk to Him and relate to Him as a heavenly Father. And here’s what good fathers do, here is what God is saying to us all throughout Scripture: “In order to keep you out of the real danger zone, I want to set up some protective barriers. If you and I are going to have conflict, let’s have it while establishing these guardrails, before anything seriously dangerous happens. I don’t want to have conflict with you on the other side of the guardrail. The conflict here is easy to resolve. The conflict over there leaves you with scars and memories and things you wish you didn’t have to deal with.” That’s what God, as a good parent, does.

TRUTH

A. Today, as we begin talking about guardrails, we’re going to look at Ephesians 5. Ephesians is simply a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to Christians in the city of Ephesus. And this is cool—you can actually visit Ephesus today. It’s in modern-day Turkey. It’s an ancient city that used to be on the coast, but the coast has moved farther out and Ephesus is now in the middle of the land. Anyway, we’re going to begin with verse 15, but let me set this up for you.

In Ephesians 5, Paul is writing to a people who lived in a culture that was absolutely out there in terms of sexuality and morals. You can visit Ephesus today and see evidence of how immoral the culture was. What we would consider unacceptable or absolutely wrong, they saw as a part of their everyday lives and totally acceptable. For instance, being unfaithful within marriage was not only considered to be okay but was expected and was even done within religious practices. So in this culture, the apostle Paul goes through a list of things like: don’t be greedy, be honest, be kind to people. And these are things everyone could get on board with. But at the end of this chapter, the list starts to get pretty strict. As you read this chapter, you start to get the sense that the audience reading this for the first time was asking, “Paul, it’s hard to disagree with you on being honest. It’s hard to disagree with you on being kind. But in a culture where nobody values these other things that you just asked us to do, how do we pull that off?” It’s an interesting question, don’t you think? Especially if you are anything like me and find yourself asking something similar from time to time.

In these verses we’re going to go over, Paul explains how to avoid the ditches on the left or the right, how a person avoids rolling his or her car off the cliff, how a person stays within the lines of the guardrail—even though, to those listening, it may have sounded like he was being really severe in what he was asking. But in doing this, he explains this principle of a guardrail even though they didn’t have guardrails back then. The example I’m going to give will be a bit disturbing for some of you. For me it’s not disturbing, and I’ll explain that.
B. So in Ephesians 5:15 Paul says: Be very careful, then—and the word then is there because it’s following this whole list of stuff that Christians ought to do—how you live (NIV). The Greek word for live actually means walk. Now when I read this, something gross comes to mind. We have two dogs, and in the morning when we let these dogs out, they do their morning business in the same 10 square feet of grass every morning. So when people come to our house and walk out to the back, we say, “Be careful!” “Why?” “That’s the danger area over there. Every morning our two dogs . . . well, just be careful.”

That’s what this verse means. Be careful. The rest of the yard is fine, but be careful over there. That’s kind of the idea Paul has in mind, but he doesn’t have dogs. So as you live your life, as you deal with relationships and sexuality or whatever it is, be very careful how you walk. And he says: Not as unwise [meaning careless], but as wise [meaning with your eyes wide open], making the most of every opportunity [meaning being very intentional with how you use your time] because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15-16 NIV).

He says, “Because of the things that I’ve called you to do, because of the life God wants you to lead, because He wants to protect you and direct you, as you live your life and in every area of life, be careful. Pay attention to how you walk and how you live and how you spend your time because the days are evil.”

C. Paul is saying to these Ephesians, and this is a couple thousand years ago, “You Ephesians are living in dangerous times. If you’re not careful, you’re going to roll your chariot or go into one of the two ditches on the side of the road. If you’re not careful, if you’re careless, there will be a price to pay ‘because the days are evil.’”

That may sound a little intense to us. Okay, maybe we can acknowledge that there is evil in the world, but to say that the days are evil? Isn’t that a bit over the top? But remember where Paul is coming from. He is speaking to a really undisciplined audience. And, while we may not always feel like “the days are evil,” most of us can recognize ways in which our world and our culture do more to promote unhealthy relationships and unhealthy decisions than they do to promote what we consider a God-centered view of things.

Okay, let’s get back to the verses. Paul goes on: Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is (Ephesians 5:17 NIV). This is a tricky little Greek thing where Paul uses a command to make us understand something, but it doesn’t make any sense that he would do this. You can’t command me to understand something. Paul uses this little Greek word in an odd way, and he says to us Christians, “I want you to understand what the Lord’s will is.” This is what he’s saying, and this is a big idea: “I want you to face up to, I want you to accept, I want you to embrace what you know in your heart God’s will and God’s plan for your life is regarding how you spend your time, your friendships, your ethics. I want you to stop deceiving yourself. I want you to stop playing games. I want you to stop smoothing things over and pretending. I want you to face up to what you know God’s will is for your life.”

APPLICATION

A. Here’s how it goes with the illustration we’ve started talking about today. He’s saying, “I want you to be honest with yourself. You know what’s on the other side of this guardrail morally. You know what can happen to your physical body. I want you to stop and face up to what you know God’s will is for your life.”

This is a two-by-four upside our heads, because all of us, Christians and non-Christians, play as close to the edge of disaster as we can in many areas of our lives. We know exactly where the little yellow line is
that keeps us from the brink of disaster, and we know where the abyss is. Our tendency is to play as close to the line as possible, to dance as close to the edge of chaos morally as we can, and if you’re a Christian, the question usually goes something like, “How close can I get without sinning?” And Paul is saying you live in a dangerous culture and a dangerous age. You’ve got to stop flirting with disaster and face up to what you know in your heart God wants you to do and what He wants you to be.

B. Then he gives us this illustration in verse 18: Do not get drunk on wine (NIV). Before I give you this illustration, here’s full disclosure. I don’t drink at all, ever. The reason I don’t is not because I think it’s a sin. The reason I don’t is I was raised in a home where there was no alcohol. My parents didn’t drink socially. It was just not a part of the culture I grew up in. Then as I grew up and could decide for myself, my experience with alcohol through other people was 100-percent negative. I started in ministry working with teenagers, and I’ve been in ministry ever since. And my experience with alcohol through other people has never, and I mean never, been good. I’ve seen alcohol lead to physical abuse, alcoholic husbands, alcoholic moms, kids crashing cars, fights, date rape—you name it. I could sit here and talk to you all afternoon about my interactions with people who drank.

Now I know that’s not true for everybody, but that’s my experience. Alcohol is just not part of my life. I’ve never heard this story: “Once we added alcohol, we all lived happily ever after.” So this is a very easy issue for me because it’s a non-issue for me. Paul is saying, “Let’s be honest, because we all know on the other side of the guardrail is something nobody wants. So let’s set up some guardrails so that if we do have some crashes, some conscience crashes, we don’t destroy our lives.”

C. So the illustration he uses is about alcohol. He says: Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery (Ephesians 5:18 NIV). Now you may not have ever heard of the word debauchery before, but hang in there, I am going to explain it in a second. But what I want you to hear is that for this audience, for this group of people in Ephesus, Paul is writing with a warning against alcohol. Paul’s about to explain to us that drunkenness is a guardrail. He’s talking to Christians here, and he’s saying, “Christian, I don’t want you to get drunk. I want you to set a personal standard of behavior that says you decide you’re not going to get drunk. The point of choosing not to get drunk is not because getting drunk is or isn’t a sin. The point of choosing not to get drunk is that getting drunk is foolish and irresponsible.” This is what he’s going to argue. He says, “I want you to decide that getting drunk leads to something you don’t want to be a part of, and in fact, getting drunk leads to something that most people agree they shouldn’t be involved in. So, Christian, I want you to establish a guardrail, and that is that you will not get drunk.” He says, “I want you to hardwire your conscience against being controlled by alcohol, so that if you are ever at a point when you realize you’re giving up your control of your life and your behavior, it would bother you so much that it would be like hitting a guardrail that causes you not to go towards what’s on the other side.” That’s what Paul is teaching: Drunkenness is an example of establishing a guardrail because it leads to debauchery, and debauchery is the problem.

Here’s the official definition of debauchery: extreme indulgence that results in a loss of control. So Paul uses this word here to describe what happens when alcohol is abused. But for most of you, this isn’t a guardrail issue because you are underage, and drinking is wrong when you are under 21. Period. NO discussion necessary. But this idea of debauchery isn’t just limited to drinking. This extreme indulgence resulting in loss of control isn’t simply an alcohol issue. We can see the same thing with food, with Face-
book, video games, television or gossip. And while Paul chose to focus on drinking, as you read this Scripture you will discover that whether it's lust, alcohol, greed, anger, food, material possessions or anything else in our lives that leads us to a loss of control and draws us toward things we don't need to be involved in, your heavenly Father is against it. On the other side of this is disaster. Paul is saying this: In any area of your life where you have the tendency to hand over control to somebody or something else, you need a guardrail.

So whatever it is we are struggling with when it comes to debauchery, Paul is saying we need to set up the guardrail and put something in place. “Be careful how you walk” because the days in which we live are dangerous. Don’t get drunk with wine because it leads to a loss of control, and the loss of control is sin. Don’t jeopardize your future because you have no control over your actions. Loss of control has led you and will lead you to some of your greatest regrets. That is why guardrails matter.

D. Now listen to what Paul contrasts the drunken picture with because it emphasizes his point: Instead, be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18 NIV). The point Paul is making is this: Your heavenly Father wants to be the main influencer in your life. The Bible teaches that when you put your faith in Christ, the Spirit of God comes to live in you in a unique way, and the Holy Spirit who lives inside of you will prompt, guide and direct you. The Holy Spirit, in my experience, never yells or screams. He usually goes “ahem” [make a throat-clearing noise]. It’s a still, small voice in our minds, and God just elbows us in the conscience. And we know, don’t we?

That’s why Paul is saying we should face up to what we know God wants for us and quit playing games. When you sense that little elbow in the conscience and that still, small voice and that warning on the inside, Paul’s saying your life’s too important; time is too short; the world’s too dangerous. Pay attention. Be careful because here’s what I know about all of us: No one plans to mess up their life. Here’s the conclusion I’ve come to over the years—nobody plans to mess up their physical body on purpose, but a lot of people have because they never plan not to. They don’t establish guardrails. Nobody ever plans to mess up a meaningful relationship—we just don’t plan not to because we never establish guardrails.

E. We think the little yellow line will work, but it doesn’t. We need guardrails—we need something that keeps us safe before it gets so dangerous we can’t recover. Please don’t insult yourself and say, “God will protect me. I’ll just do this a little.” Everybody says that. No, your heavenly Father, because He loves you, says, “I want you to be careful how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise. Not as foolish, but as wise. I want you to take advantage of every opportunity, I want you to be intentional about your time, I want you to face up to what I want for your life, and I want you to establish boundaries.” You need personal standards that become a matter of conscience, that keep you from a loss of control—far from it, so you never even get close to this kind of danger. And when everybody else says, “What do you mean you’re not going to [fill in the blank]? Is it because you’re a Christian? Do you think it’s a sin?” somehow in your own way you can say, “I’m not saying you shouldn’t. I’m just saying I shouldn’t. This is as far as I allow myself to go in this area. I have set a personal standard of behavior so that when I bump up against that standard I feel as if I’ve done something wrong. I’ve decided that this is how God wants to guard me from whatever is on the other side that ultimately everybody agrees is dangerous ground. This is my guardrail.” So here’s what we’re going to do: For the next few weeks we’re going to look at some specific areas, and we’re going to talk about friendship, boundaries and other possible danger zones.
A. But here’s where I want you to land today. As I’ve been talking, for some of you something very specific came to mind. Paul talked about alcohol to the Ephesians. For you it may be food. It may be how you spend your time—on Facebook, on the phone, watching TV. Whatever it is, you know that there’s some area of your life where you have been dancing on the edge of the yellow line, and you need to back up about three feet and set up a standard that keeps you from the yellow line. It may be something physical you’re doing; it may be relational. And as you’ve listened to this message there’s something inside of you, a little warning—that’s the Holy Spirit. It’s God who says, “You need to change direction. Things are starting to look dangerous. I am not being a killjoy—I want to rescue you from something bad, not keep you from something good.” You need a guardrail. Guys, maybe there’s an area in your life where once you get close to the edge, you are so overwhelmed with lust that you really lose self-control. What would it look like to back up to someplace safe and put a guardrail in the ground that maybe none of your buddies ever understand but may be the thing God uses to rescue you?

B. I don’t know what it is, but I have a feeling that while I’ve been talking, some things have come to mind. My hunch is that whatever came to mind, that’s where God would like to start with you in your life. And you don’t need three more messages on this to begin setting up some guardrails, because chances are you already know where you need to plant the guardrail, where you need a personal standard of behavior that informs and energizes your conscience.

My promise to you based on Scripture and personal experience is that no one has ever regretted establishing a guardrail, ever, but there are plenty of people—plenty of us—who look back and wish that we had. I want you to think about it this week, and I want you to face up to what you know in your heart your heavenly Father wants you to do.

[TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS]