

Boundaries

How to Set Healthy Boundaries
Without Feeling Guilty

HOPE *for the* HEART

HOPE *for the* HEART

Because hope means everything.

At Hope for the Heart, hope gets real.

We know life is a series of challenges. But finding help shouldn't be.

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It's all life-giving counsel that's key to living whole and free. For God's heart is to see you live abundantly and share the hope you have in Christ.

So that whatever you're facing—or whoever comes to you—you have every reason for hope, for every challenge in life.

Because hope means everything.

*“For everything that was written
in the past was written to teach us,
so that through the endurance
taught in the Scriptures and
the encouragement they provide
we might have hope.”*

(ROMANS 15:4)

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BOUNDARIES

How to Set Them—How to Keep Them

What Are Boundaries?

Do people often take advantage of you? Do you say *Yes* to everyone and *No* to no one? Do you think you're supposed to meet everyone else's needs? If so, you need boundaries.

Just as nations have protective boundaries, your relationships need protective boundaries to guard your personal time, emotional energy, and physical strength. We cannot *be everything* or *do everything* for anyone—much less *everyone*.

You need to know where your responsibility ends and someone else's begins. This means at times, you need to say *No* to people so you can say *Yes* to God. Just as the Lord established physical boundaries when He created the world, He also established boundaries for our lives and relationships.

*"I, the LORD, define the ocean's sandy shoreline
as an everlasting boundary that the waters cannot cross.
The waves may toss and roar, but they can never pass the boundaries I set."
(JEREMIAH 5:22 NLT)*

A boundary is an established limit—a line that should not be crossed.

- A marked limit of an area, a dividing line
- A limit intended to create necessary space
- A dividing line that separates one entity from another

Physical boundaries are territorial lines that divide one area from another.

- In the Bible, the first boundary was spoken directly from God to Adam. "The Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die'" (Genesis 2:16–17).
- You have both the right of personal control and the responsibility of setting rules for others regarding what is yours. God, the Creator and owner of the Garden of Eden, had the right to set the rules for everything and everyone in the garden.
- "For when you eat from it [the tree] you will certainly die" (Genesis 2:17).

Moral boundaries are ethical lines that divide right from wrong.

- When a boundary is respected, the result is a reward. God set up a moral boundary for Adam and Eve—what was right and what was wrong; what led to life and what led to death. When God's boundary was honored, the couple enjoyed a reward—the abundance of the garden and unbroken fellowship with God.
- When a boundary is rejected, the result is a repercussion. When God's boundary was violated, the couple experienced a repercussion—sin entered the world, which disqualified Adam and Eve from staying within the bounds of the garden.

- When you communicate a clear, rightful boundary—with a reward and a repercussion—and someone violates that boundary, the repercussion is inevitable and, if possible, instantaneous. In choosing to violate a boundary, the violator, not the boundary-setter, is choosing the repercussion.

The principle of rewards and repercussions was clearly demonstrated when God set a boundary with Adam and Eve. By choosing to violate that boundary, they chose the repercussion that God stated.

"To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.'"
(GENESIS 3:17)

What Is the Purpose and Benefit of Personal Boundaries?

Personal boundaries are like fences, protecting you from wrong people, wrong places, and wrong priorities. Personal boundaries also guard you from giving more time, talent, and tolerance than you should, protecting you from people taking more than they should.

Personal boundaries are the healthy by-product of realizing we are uniquely separate from one another and personally responsible for our own actions and responses. Boundaries are necessary to protect you from those who might attempt to take advantage of you. The Bible reveals the treasure within you that is to be guarded above everything else.

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."
(PROVERBS 4:23)

Personal boundaries convey:

- What you are—and what you aren't
- What you value—and what you don't
- What you believe—and what you don't
- What you'll endure—and what you won't
- What you'll accept—and what you won't

Personal boundaries allow you to:

- Determine what belongs to you and what belongs to another
- Decide who and what you will prioritize in your life
- Demonstrate how you will maintain control over your body, soul, and spirit
- Declare limits in your relationships—and your right to enforce them
- Determine how you will maintain your moral convictions, not violating your conscience

"At times, you need to say *No* to people so you can say *Yes* to God."

Relational boundaries enable you to:

- Stand up for yourself and share your relationship restrictions appropriately
- Feel comfortable in giving honest feedback without fear
- Be firm with others, thoughtfully and unapologetically
- Respect the rules of others and act in their best interest
- Establish and maintain healthy give-and-take relationships

Emotional and mental boundaries equip you to:

- Evaluate the appropriateness of your thoughts and emotions in light of God’s Word
- Guard against letting your own emotions (or someone else’s) control you
- Feel the freedom to agree or disagree with others without fear or guilt
- Communicate your own thoughts and emotions in a Christlike way
- Disengage from those who try to manipulate, hurt, or lie to you

“For we are each responsible for our own conduct.”

(GALATIANS 6:5 NLT)

How to Establish Boundaries in a Verbally Abusive Relationship

You can curtail verbal and emotional abuse by developing a plan to prevent yourself from being controlled. You cannot change another person, but you can change yourself so that the abusive tactics previously used on you are no longer effective and cease to ensnare you. As you determine the appropriate boundaries, realize that these boundaries are designed to guard your heart, mind, and emotions.

*“My child, listen and be wise:
Keep your heart on the right course.”*

(PROVERBS 23:19 NLT)

1. State clearly, in a conversation or a letter, what you are willing to accept and not accept from the abuser.

- Communicate your position in a positive way. (Practice what you will say in advance.)
- Do not justify yourself. Do not be apologetic, just state the boundary:
- “I want our relationship to continue, but . . .
 - “I’m not willing to listen to your name-calling.”
 - “I’m not willing to hear your accusations about (name) any longer.”
 - “Talking negatively about the past, about you or me, or anyone else is counterproductive.”
 - “I’m not willing to be controlled by your silent treatment any longer.”
- Keep what you say short and succinct.

*“A truly wise person uses few words;
a person with understanding is even-tempered.”*

(PROVERBS 17:27 NLT)

2. Announce the consequence you will enforce if the abuser violates your requests.

- Your response should be a matter of separating yourself from the abuser.
- You cannot change the abuser’s behavior, but you can remove yourself from frequent exposure to unacceptable behavior.
- “I want to visit with you, but . . .
 - ♦ “If you call me a bad name again, I will leave for a period of time.”
 - ♦ “If you persist in making that accusation, I will immediately end our conversation.”
 - ♦ “If you give me the silent treatment, I will go and find someone else to talk with.”
- Consequences are part of God’s plan.

“A man reaps what he sows.”
(GALATIANS 6:7)

3. Enforce the consequence every single time abuse occurs.

- Do not bluff! The abuser needs to know that you are going to act consistently on your words.
- Plan on being tested multiple times.
- In your mind and heart . . .
 - ♦ Say *No* to manipulation.
 - ♦ Say *No* to pressure.
 - ♦ Say *No* to control.
- You need to show that the abusive tactics are no longer effective on you.

“Let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ be no.”
(JAMES 5:12 ESV)

4. Hold your ground and absolutely do not negotiate.

- Since verbal abusers do not use words fairly, negotiation will not work.
- Instead of “talking out” the problem, your abuser will seek to wear you out.
- Simply state that when the behavior stops, you look forward to a renewed relationship.
 - ♦ “I am not willing to discuss this topic any longer.”
 - ♦ “I have stated clearly what I will not accept.”
 - ♦ “When you are ready to respect my requests, let me know. I look forward to enjoying being together at that time.”
- Keep your words brief and to the point.

“Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues.”
(PROVERBS 10:19)

5. Respond when your boundary is violated—never react out of instinct or out of anger.

- Expect your boundary to be violated . . . but don’t react.
- Expect your boundary to be violated again . . . and again. But don’t react.
- If you react, you will find yourself back under the control of the abuser.
- Respond by detaching yourself from the abuser and enforcing your repercussions.

*“The end of a matter is better than its beginning,
and patience is better than pride.
Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit.”
(ECCLESIASTES 7:8–9)*

6. Ask for support from one or two wise, objective people to help you through this process.

- Include supporters as you analyze and identify the problem.
- Include supporters as you determine how to articulate your plan.
- Include supporters as you enforce the repercussions.
- Include supporters—friend, mentor, counselor—to help you through this critical period.
 - ♦ Discuss the situation with your supporters.
 - ♦ Discuss the tactics used on you.
 - ♦ Discuss the plan of action.

*“in abundance of counselors there is victory.”
(PROVERBS 24:6 ESV)*

7. Expect manipulative maneuvers and emotional ups and downs.

- Assume that your actions will make the abuser angry.
- Allow your abuser to react without reacting yourself.
- Do not seek to placate and appease this person—it won’t work.
- Think of this time period as comparable to having surgery. It is a painful experience, but it provides hope for healing and having a new, healthy relationship.
- Remember God is with you each step of the way.

*“For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.”
(ISAIAH 41:13)*

4 POINTS OF GOD'S PLAN

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, *there is hope*. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will accept His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD,
'plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.'"*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"* (John 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:10).

2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway"* (Romans 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *"Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God"* (Isaiah 59:2). Scripture also says, *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

3. God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). The Bible says, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . ."* (Acts 16:31).

4. Your Part: Surrender

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, “*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?*” (Matthew 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, “*It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast*” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me
the person you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, “*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .*” (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)

The information in this resource is intended as guidelines for healthy living. Please consult qualified medical, legal, pastoral, and psychological professionals regarding individual concerns.

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HOPE for the **HEART**

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

God gives us His Word not just for information but for transformation. The Lord wants you to “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). This isn’t something you do alone, but something God does in you by His Spirit.

The following questions are designed to help you reflect on the biblical truths in this resource. Take a moment to pray and ask God to settle your mind and quiet your spirit as you reflect on His truth.

“Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.”
(2 TIMOTHY 2:7)

What are two key truths, Bible verses, or “takeaways” from this resource that you found helpful—or that you simply needed to be reminded of?

In relation to this topic, what behavior(s) do you need to *begin, change, or stop* in order to help you grow into the person God created you to be?

In relation to this topic, what is the biggest obstacle you need to overcome in order to move forward?

What might your life look like a few years from now if you do *not* make changes regarding this issue? How might your life be different if you *do* make changes?

Is there anyone in your life who needs help with this topic/issue? How can you pray for them, and what is one thing you can do to encourage them?

What can you give thanks to God for today?

*“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself
and God our Father, who loved us
and by his grace gave us eternal comfort
and a wonderful hope,
comfort you and strengthen you
in every good thing you do and say.”
(2 THESSALONIANS 2:16–17 NLT)*

The Complete System of Care

Designed with the whole person in mind, Hope for the Heart's *Complete System of Care* provides a comprehensive library of resources and training tools that are all professionally informed, rooted in God's Word. Centered around our 100+ topic *Keys for Living Library*, these practical, biblical resources ensure you have everything you need when getting to the heart of common life issues.

Whether for personal help or training purposes, it's all key to being completely equipped for effective care and counsel. From practical guidance in our books to deeper insights through courses, events, and media, these tools work together to help you experience freedom and transformation in Christ—and equip you to share that hope with others.

Explore our resources today and get the tools you need to take better care of yourself and others.



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