Biblical examples: Adam and Eve.

Boundaries in our lives are necessary, and the Bible is full of boundary examples of every kind along with the consequences of either respecting or disrespecting them. Perhaps the first examples in Scripture of boundaries are physical ones: God’s separation of darkness and light, land and sea (Genesis 1:3-7). However, we soon read of more boundaries and the consequences of not respecting them. We don’t read of any physical boundaries around the Garden of Eden except for the bordering rivers (Genesis 2:10-14). Adam and Eve knew their home and were free to move about as they pleased. The only restriction was not to partake of the fruit of a certain tree (Genesis 2:17). We find Satan trying to manipulate Eve, and because her boundaries were not strong enough, she conceded and ate of the forbidden fruit. She didn’t respect Adam’s boundaries either and offered him some fruit which he ate, violating his own boundaries (Genesis 3:1-7). Of course, they reacted in shame and tried to hide from God (Genesis 3:9). Not only did their behavior violate God’s boundary and cost them dearly, but their sin nature was passed on to all generations.

Young man in Proverbs 7.

We find more violated boundaries in the account of the young man in Proverbs 7 who is described as being simple and without judgment. He is tempted to spend the evening with a woman whose husband has left for a time. Because he has placed no boundaries upon his impulses and desires, he fails to see the consequences of his sinful behavior and is caught like a bird in a snare. The woman didn’t respect the young man’s boundaries and was a manipulator to get what she wanted. She also didn’t respect her marriage boundaries and was interested only in serving her own desires.

Joseph.

An excellent example of someone establishing and maintaining his own boundaries as well as respecting the boundaries of others is the account of Joseph in Genesis 37-47. Although his brothers seriously violated his boundaries when they sold him into slavery, Joseph had faith and respect for God’s boundaries and accepted God’s will in his life. He also maintained his personal boundaries in various situations throughout his life, such as when Potiphar’s wife tried to coerce him into sinful behavior, while spending years in prison for a crime he didn’t commit, his interactions with Pharaoh, and how he treated his brothers.

The Good Samaritan.

The account of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 illustrates how healthy boundaries can be employed in our lives. The priest and Levite that passed by the injured man were exercising rigid boundaries because of their position and/or a misapplication of God’s Word. Maybe they had urgent business and feared becoming unclean by touching someone wounded and possibly dead, which would have required them to undergo a lengthy cleansing ritual. This kept them from offering love and assistance to one in need. The Samaritan was also a busy man going about his day, but he opened the gate of his time boundary to offer assistance. He put the injured man on his donkey, opening yet another personal property boundary in an appropriate way. When he brought the man to the inn, however, he didn’t stay there. The Bible doesn’t record their conversations, but we can imagine that the injured man could have been reluctant to see his
benefactor leave. However, the Good Samaritan exercised his own boundaries and after having done what he could, he went on his way with the promise that any additional expenses would be covered at a later time. He established a boundary. Suppose the injured man had asked him to stay, and the Samaritan had relented and stayed for a week. He would have been guilty of not respecting his own boundaries and his need to get on with his journey by allowing the injured man to infringe upon his resources. This would also be an example of the injured man not being respectful of his benefactor’s boundaries, taking advantage of the Good Samaritan’s benevolence, and maybe even sending him on a guilt trip to make him stay. Helping the injured man too much may have limited his ability to fully heal and to bear his own burden as much as possible.

Setting limits.

We may not always think of the limits that we set as boundaries, and some of the terminology may be new to us, but we can understand the concepts of taking control of our behaviors and attitudes and bringing them into compliance with the Word of God. A list of appropriate boundaries is found in the Ten Commandments. The Sermon on the Mount is also filled with directives on how to establish biblical boundaries in our lives and in our relationships with others. God expects us to help others, to develop and maintain healthy relationships, and to grow in spiritual maturity.

2 Peter 3:8 “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.”

Boundary laws.

The “Boundaries” book identifies ten boundary laws. Some of them may seem like simple common sense and yet these concepts are powerful and very significant in establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries.

- The Law of Sowing and Reaping – we will reap what we sow.
- The Law of Responsibility – each is responsible for himself or herself.
- The Law of Power – by God’s grace we have the power to change ourselves but not others.
- The Law of Respect – we accept the boundaries of others.
- The Law of Motivation – first we are to seek our own freedom from personal fears, and then we are to serve others.
- The Law of Evaluation – accept that our boundaries may cause pain to others.
- The Law of Proactivity – for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, but proactive people make their decisions ahead of events instead of reacting to events.
- The Law of Envy – defines that which we don’t have as “good” and that which we have as “not good,” and it is a sign that we are lacking something and need to take action to change the situation.
- The Law of Activity – boundaries can only be created by asking, seeking, and knocking.
- The Law of Exposure – boundaries need to be communicated openly.

Next month: We will explore the resistance to boundaries as well as the need for self-examination and personal application in the conclusion of this four-part series.