

# Boundaries

Townsend and Cloud (adapted from questions found on the internet)

## Session 1

Boundaries Chapters 1-4

- Look at Sherrie's day. (pages 15-26) If Sherrie came to you for advice, what would you say to her? How would you help her with her problem?

*You can probably identify with Sherrie's dilemma — her isolation, her helplessness, her confusion, her guilt, and, above all, her sense that her life is out of control. Trying harder isn't working for her. Being nice out of fear isn't working for her. Taking responsibility for others isn't working for her. Sherrie still suffers severely from her inability to take ownership of her life. She has great difficulty knowing what things are her responsibility and what things are not. In her desire to do the right thing or to avoid conflict, she ends up taking on problems that God never intended her to take on (pp. 26 – 28).*

- Any confusion about responsibility and ownership in our lives is a problem of boundaries. Why are Christians confused about boundaries — about when and how to draw them or even whether drawing boundaries is okay?
- Why do you think the world is confused about boundaries?

*Remember the story of Bill (pp. 29 – 31)? His parents paid his bills, fretted over his circumstances, worried about his future, and exerted much energy to keep him going. Bill didn't study, plan, or work, yet he had a nice place to live, plenty of money, and all the rights of a family member who was doing his part. He was irresponsible and happy — and they were responsible and miserable. And remember how we helped his parents see that? We compared Bill to a man who never watered his lawn. Whenever his neighbors turned on their sprinkler system, the water fell on Bill's lawn. Their grass was turning brown and dying, but Bill saw his green grass and thought his yard was doing fine. We suggested that they define the property lines a little better and fix the sprinkler system so that water would fall on their own lawn. Perhaps then, when Bill didn't water his lawn and found himself living in dirt, he would recognize that he had a problem and would do something about it (p. 30).*

- Is it cruel to stop watering someone else's yard? Would it be cruel for the person who is watering your yard to stop? Why or why not?
- Why are spiritual boundaries as important as physical boundaries?

*Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows where you end and someone else begins, leading to a sense of ownership. We have to deal with what is in our soul (Prov.14:10), and boundaries help us define what that is. The Bible tells us clearly what our parameters are and how to protect them, but often our family or other past relationships have confused us about our parameters (p. 32).*

- Explain how knowing what you are to own and take responsibility for gives you freedom.
- Why does pain result when we are not shown the parameters of our soul or are taught wrong parameters  
*Now look at Galatians 6:5. The Greek words for burden and load give important insight into these two verses. Burden means "excess burdens," boulders that we need help carrying. Load means "cargo" or "the burden of daily toil." These loads are like knapsacks. A knapsack is possible to carry, and we are expected to carry our own. We are expected to deal with our own feelings, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as the responsibilities God has given us, even though it takes effort. In addition, we are not to carry the knapsacks of others (Luke 9:23) (pp. 32 – 33).*
- Discuss how you would help your guidees who:
  - a. Has acted as if their "boulders" are their daily load and have refused help?
  - b. Has acted as if their "daily load" is a boulder that they shouldn't have to carry?

A lack of boundaries produces a variety of bad fruit. These show up in three main areas of life

1. Clinical Symptoms include: depression, resentment, rage or anger, and obsessive and compulsive behaviors.
2. Relational Symptoms stem from a sense of loss of freedom and loss of love.
3. Functional Symptoms include: inability to complete a goal or task, extreme disorganization, low energy level, and problems of concentration.

### **Clinical Symptom Questions**

- Which clinical symptoms are you most familiar with (either from your own experience or from your interactions with others)?
- How can an awareness of our boundaries help us deal with these symptoms?
- Why is the concept of 'personal control' or 'ownership' essential to gaining control over clinical symptoms?

### **Relational Symptom Questions**

- Why is the direct controller easier to deal with than a manipulative controller?
- Why are people often afraid to deal with their relational problems?
- When you experience relational symptoms, do they more often stem from a loss of freedom or from a loss of love? How do you usually resolve these feelings?

### **Functional Symptoms Questions**

- When your boundaries are not defined, which functional symptom affects you first? How can you begin to gain control over this area of your life?

## Session 2

### Boundaries Chapters 5-8

**A. LAW 1: THE LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING: We are personally responsible for our own actions and consequences of those actions.**

- When the law of sowing and reaping is interrupted or suspended, somebody sows and the wrong person reaps. How have you seen this illustrated in our culture today?
- What are some of the consequences of interrupting the law of sowing and reaping? Does protecting that person from consequences help the individual live virtuous a life?
- What are some suggestions to begin to develop healthy patterns of 'sowing and reaping'?

**B. LAW 2: THE RESPONSIBILITY 'FOR' AND 'TO' LAW: We are responsible for our own feelings, actions, and behaviors. When we take responsibility for someone else, we keep them in an immature state.**

- Why do people tend to take on responsibilities for other people?
- What has the fruit of this kind of love?

**C. Law 3: The Law of Power and Powerlessness: We cannot change anybody else, but we can change ourselves with God's help.**

- Under the Law of Power you will find a list of six things we have the power to do, which ones that you think people find the most challenging and why?

**D. LAW 4: THE LAW OF RECEIVING OTHERS' BOUNDARIES: We need to learn to hear other people's no.**

- What is an example of how we can respect others Boundaries?
- Why are we able to love more when we embrace the boundaries of others?

**E. Law 5: The Law of Motivation: Boundaries help us gain control of our own lives and fulfill what we were created for – love. When we have the proper motivation we experience freedom and responsibility.**

- Why is the law of motivation important?
- How can we guide people to be motivated by love?

**F. Law 6: EVALUATING THE PAIN CAUSED BY YOUR BOUNDARIES: There is a difference between hurt and harm.**

- What is the difference between 'hurt' and 'harm'?
- In what ways does suffering/pain help us grow?

**G. LAW 7: THE LAW OF PROACTIVE VERSUS REACTIVE BOUNDARIES: Proactive means freely choosing to love, enjoy, and serve one another. Reactive means letting someone else define and direct who we are and what we do.**

- What are some tools you can share to move the people you guide towards being more of a responder than a reactor?

**H. LAW 8: THE LAW OF ENVY: Envy is seeing the good as that which we do not have.**

- In what ways does envy affect boundaries? Affect relationships?
- How can you help someone to begin to find happiness in what they have, not in what they want?
- If the best antidote to Envy is Gratitude, what are some ideas for turning envy into gratitude:

**I. LAW 9: THE LAW OF ACTIVITY: Boundaries are created in our lives when we do something. We must take the initiative and accept the responsibility for our feelings, attitudes, and behaviors.**

- What are some good ways to strengthen your boundaries?

**J. LAW 10: THE LAW OF EXPOSURE: Internal boundaries need to be evident and communicated to others.**

- What are some ways to make evident and communicate your boundaries?
- Why is it important to communicate your boundaries well?

**EIGHT COMMON MYTHS THAT A BOUNDARY-SETTING PERSON MAY ENCOUNTER ARE IDENTIFIED AND REFUTED. REVIEW THESE MYTHS:**

- 1. When I say no or set a limit "I'm being selfish." (There is a difference between being selfish and being self-centered).**
- 2. "I'm being disobedient if I say no." (We are accountable to God, not people).**
- 3. "If I set limits, I'm going to lose love or be hurt." (Fear of being abandoned, yet living without boundaries, usually means we aren't really connected to others).**

4. **“If I set boundaries, I will hurt others.” (Boundaries are defensive tools, they protect us – our intention is important).**
5. **“Boundaries mean I’m angry.” (Actually, boundaries help us to be less angry).**
6. **“When others set boundaries, it injures me.” (Relationships consist of a balance of togetherness and separateness, in that order).**
7. **Setting a boundary makes me feel guilty or bad. “But they’ve done so much for me.” (Love is a free gift without a price tag or I.O.U).**
8. **“Boundaries are permanent.” (Boundaries are always open to change by the boundary setter).**
  - What did you learn from these myths? How did you grow from this?
  - What are some of the fears people may have for saying no?
  - Why is it important to remember that we are each responsible for our boundaries?

### **Session 3**

#### Boundaries Chapters 9-12

#### **K. What struck you personally from each of the below chapters?**

- Chapter 9 Boundaries and your Spouse:
  
- Chapter 10 Boundaries and Your Children
  
- Chapter 11 Boundaries and Your Work
  
- Chapter 12 Boundaries and Your Self

## **TOPIC: Triangulation (pages 133-135, 139, 165)**

### **Triangulation** (Light's Blog)

**When functional people have something to say, they say it to you. When dysfunctional people have something to say, they may tell someone else instead.**

Triangulation is the act of telling a third party something that should be delivered straight to the person involved.

**There are two kinds of triangulation:**

**Well-Meaning Triangulation** Well-meaning triangulation is often a response to a dysfunctional person or environment. If employees are working under a toxic supervisor, or if a family member flies off the handle when asked not to be disrespectful of others, then triangulation among the rest is more likely to occur, because people feel like they can't speak freely without undue negative consequences. It's still important to try to avoid triangulation; however, it's harder not to when the situation doesn't *support* healthy behavior. People raised in dysfunctional families who haven't worked through their issues yet can often triangulate out of habit or out of fear, or based on the assumption that there aren't healthy alternatives. In these cases, the triangulation may be happening because the environment is dysfunctional, or it may be happening because the environment is *assumed to be* dysfunctional. In either case, the person who is doing the triangulating generally means well, but hasn't yet overcome the dysfunctional pattern of triangulation.

**Ill-Intentioned Triangulation:** Ill-intentioned triangulation comes from a toxic person who is manipulating. It serves this triangulator best to have others involved in their toxic drama games. In these cases, the triangulation is little more than a tool used to drag the most people possible into the toxic swirl of their schemes as possible. Telling third (and fourth, and fifth) parties brings them more power or more gratification than it does to work toward the resolution of any issues. It is helpful to remember that there are two kinds of people in the world – those whose intentions are good and who may be involved in dysfunction because they haven't yet broken through the bad patterns of behavior, and those who create and maintain the bad patterns in the first place because it gratifies them to manipulate in order to get what they want and/or to and make others feel bad. The ill-intentioned triangulator is the second type.

Triangulators require a willing and interactive listening party.

**What are Some Examples of Triangulation that you may encounter in Spiritual Guidance. Discuss. Why is triangulation so harmful?**

## **TOPIC: Transference (pages 210-2011)**

### **Transference** (rcspiritualdirection)

**Can transference occur in Spiritual Direction?**

**This is an interesting question but I'd like to separate it into two:**

- Can transference occur in the spiritual life?
- Can transference occur with a spiritual director?

First, let's look at a definition of the term "transference". Transference is a psychological term that means "the redirection of feelings and desires, especially of those unconsciously retained from childhood, toward a new object." \* It commonly occurs in psychotherapy and can be used effectively by a therapist in the therapeutic process to expose and resolve early relationship conflicts and wounds.

So, to answer the first question: Can transference occur in the spiritual life? Sure. As a therapist I often ask clients to whom they best relate ...God the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit or Our Lady. Their answer can hold the key to a deeper understanding of their early relationships. In turn, understanding their early relationships can also clue us in to potential problems in their spiritual formation and spiritual life.

If while growing up we had a distant parent, we may have trouble relating to God, our heavenly Father as truly being present and interested in our lives. If, our parents were abusive or critical, it can be difficult to imagine God not waiting to pounce on us for our imperfections. I remember a friend of mine who grew up with a schizophrenic mother. I once suggested she pray to Mary. She shrugged her shoulders and said "I never think she's listening." Afterwards she reflected on it and realized that was because of her mom who, when in a psychotic episode, couldn't be present to her. With that insight she decided to get to know Mary better and developed a deep relationship with this heavenly mother, who, as at Cana, sees our needs and intercedes for us even when we don't know she's watching.

So, let's tackle the second question: Can transference occur in spiritual direction? The answer is yes, and it can be both good and bad. Although spiritual direction is aimed at discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives, because it involves a human relationship, human dynamics will inevitably come into play.

Like counseling, spiritual direction is a unique human relationship in that it is pretty much one sided. The directee is sharing his or her life, experiences and feelings with the spiritual director. The spiritual director is present without usually sharing much about his or her own life and experiences, except perhaps that which can be helpful to the directee. For someone who has not received adequate affirmation and unconditional love growing up, this can be very healing, but caution is advised here. The director can easily be idealized by the directee as they perceive a deep need for unconditional acceptance being fulfilled. A wise director would be aware of this phenomenon and guide the directee back to God and away from his or herself accordingly. The goal is always a deeper relationship with God, not the director.

Another example in which transference can come into play would be with a person who perhaps had a critical or demanding parent. Such a person may hold things back from his or her spiritual director out of fear of criticism or coercion. If this is recognized by the directee and/or spiritual director, discussing and working it through can yield great results as it can also expose a similar dynamic in their relationship with God.

**“Countertransference”**, when the director’s unconscious needs, desires or experiences are triggered by the directee can also occur, as is common in therapy. Again, a wise director is aware of that and will seek to work that through, perhaps in their own spiritual direction. Sadly, I’ve seen many well meaning priests get into trouble after entering into spiritual direction or counseling relationships with female parishioners, unaware of the needs or feelings that were being triggered in themselves. Hence psychological health and emotional maturity are critical qualities to look for in a good spiritual director.

One more note, the hallmark of any healthy relationship is a profound respect for the freedom of the other individual involved. Spiritual direction should be a liberating experience and not one that should cause more anxiety or distress. For the average person, there is no vow or expectation of obedience between the directee and the spiritual director. That being said however, following the advice of the director freely, especially in those areas that may be challenging, would be the sensible road to take and one that can lead to the most growth. As in all things, trust your gut...if something doesn’t feel right in a spiritual direction relationship, it could indicate unhealthy transference or countertransference occurring. Talking it out with someone familiar with the spiritual direction process would be a good idea.

#### **Session 4**

Boundaries Chapters 13-16

What struck you most from these chapters?

Resistances to Boundaries

In moving toward recovery or growth, we will always encounter some resistance. This resistance will either come from external or internal sources. Discuss.

What resistances to boundaries do you encounter from outside yourself?

In your experience what is one of the resistance that many people fear? What are some tools you can help people deal with the resistance you named?

How to Measure Success with Boundaries

Discuss the twelve steps in the recovery process that can help us measure our progress.

What was one new insight have you gained form this section?



Since beginning this book, what new insights have you taken from it?

Discuss how living a life with boundaries, offers a person freedom?

How does a person with boundaries live differently from someone who does not live with boundaries?

Does knowing that boundaries are about being a good steward of what God gave you help you to live boundaries?

