

Set Boundaries

Part 2 in the message series, "Beyond Hurt"

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Well, hello and good morning. If we haven't already met, my name is Dominic Tuttle, I have the joy and honor of directing the Youth and Young Adult Ministries here at St. Paul's.

One of the most important skills that we need to master as followers of Jesus is establishing boundaries. In order to successfully navigate a difficult, potentially messy situation, we absolutely must be clear on who we are, what we are and are not responsible for and how to protect ourselves when we've been hurt.

If we don't, then little hurts become big hurts and big hurts become massive wounds. If you get a scratch and you don't put a simple boundary, a bandage on it, the scratch could get infected. Now, it's a bigger problem, causing you much more pain and you're going to have to clean the wound and potentially get some antibiotics. And then, of course, put a bandage on the wound. Otherwise, that infected wound could become gangrenous, which can result in amputation!

As you just heard, the scripture read in the New Living Translation Matthew 18:8-9, Jesus says,

"If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away."

I imagine him just smiling as he's saying that it is better to enter heaven crippled or lame than to be thrown into the unquenchable fire with both of your hands and feet.

"And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better to enter heaven half blind than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell."

It is absolutely worth mentioning here that Jesus is using a teaching technique called hyperbole. Commonly mispronounced as hyper bowl. More on that later. His statement grabs our attention. I'll go ahead and speak for myself. I'd like to keep my hands, feet, and eyes. Thank you.

So is Jesus really telling us to maim ourselves? Not quite. This is the same tone that he uses two chapters earlier in Matthew 16:24, then Jesus said to his disciples,

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Now, keep in mind, Matthew 16, this is not the end of the gospel of Matthew. This is not yet the point where Jesus has been crucified on a cross. And yet here he is to his disciples, saying If you want to be my disciple, you're going to have to take up your

cross and follow me already. Jesus is imparting to his followers. That in order to be a disciple in order to follow Christ, you have to acknowledge something. Things aren't going to be easy. In fact, you're going to have to pick up your method of execution and follow me. That's some heavy language Jesus is leveraging and his disciples. That is not how popular people get people to follow them. Hmm. And yet. Thousands of years later, millions of us are still following him, so there must have been something to that.

Jesus is instructing his followers, and now that's us to set some boundaries between the old self and the new. When we are born again, the old flesh passes away and we begin to live in the spirit John Chapter 3.

With this use of hyperbole. Hyper Bowl, I love that word. Jesus is almost shouting at his disciples, "Hey, pay attention." Set up your boundaries against sin now! Don't let your circumstances push or pull you into sin and injury.

Boundaries are so important at every level. They define responsibility, boundaries are like invisible property lines of our lives, even if there isn't a fence between the houses. Neighbors tend to know where their lawn ends, and next door begins. We generally have a pretty good idea who what grass is our responsibility to cut.

That's why knowing our boundaries is so important. But the point of having boundaries isn't just so that we can know what we're responsible for. That's an entire sermon, all on its own. So, picture with me, if you will, a fence. Nice white picket fence, maybe. Solid six-foot vinyl white fence. Old fashioned rough wood fence. Electric barbed wire fence. A fence. Any fence you feel comfortable with.

A fence is actually very biblical. Let me show you:

Proverbs Chapter 4:23 from the NIV,

"Above all else, guard your hearts for everything you do flows from it."

Guard your heart. Guard. In fencing. Before the competition can begin, someone has to declare en guard, effectively saying, "Hey, we're about to start sparring. Pay attention." If there is a royal guard, it's not just a group of people sitting around going, "What should we have for dinner? I don't know. What do you want? Oh, I don't know." That's not guarding that standing around. I'm pretty good at standing around. Let me tell you, if you need someone to just stand around, I'm your guy. You can hire me. No, to guard means to be alert. Paying attention to protect something. And the Proverbs here is telling us to guard our hearts for everything you do flows from your heart. Of course, you want to protect that.



Let's look at this slightly differently, Proverbs 25:28 from the New King James version,

“Whoever has no rule over his spirits is like a city broken down without walls.
Who has no rule over his own spirit, that self-control that's being alert as to what
you're doing and what's going on.”

You know, that's not like, Oh no, I wasn't paying attention and I accidentally ate five donuts. That's not paying attention. Right? You don't accidentally you ignore what you're doing and you're not present in the moment. You're not guarding yourself from all those delicious pastries. You have to guard yourself. And so here are the proverbs. Whoever has no rule over his own spirit, whoever has no self-control is like a city with broken walls or worse, no walls. See, in Proverbs, we're instructed in wisdom to establish boundaries, to have some kind of guard, some type of wall around our hearts, our lives.

Proverbs is all for a fence, not offense, a space fence. Good, but let's clarify what makes a good fence, and I'll start with a bad fence because sometimes the easiest way to define something is by explaining what it's not. There are two kinds of really bad sense, the obvious bad fence is a fence like Proverbs 25:28 here, lots of holes in it. Have you ever seen someone who just has a gate and then no fence? I could just walk around it. Why is it there? Maybe it's a remnant of a previous fence that was there and they just left the gate because it was installed really secure. We don't know. A good fit, if you've got a dog, you need a good fence that's going to go all the way around your property. That's a good fence, a bad fence is not going to go all the way around your property. It's going to have gaps. Dogs can get in and out. I use dogs just as an example, of course, as the fence is an example. But there's another kind of bad fence.

A bad fence has no gate. Not only is this awkward, but it changes the overall function of everything inside and out instead of your home being a place of comfort and rest to venture out from to work or school shops and playgrounds. If there's no gate in the fence, the home becomes a hermitage. On one hand, yeah, no more bad stuff comes in. Great. No good stuff is lost or stolen. Awesome. That's good, right? But what about food? What about groceries, the things that you need, the good stuff you need to bring into your home? Are you generating garbage? Stuff that needs to go out to the curb? Stuff that you don't want to keep in your home if there's no gate? Good stuff can't come in and bad stuff can't be put out.

So, a good fence circles your property, defines your boundaries and has a gate. That allows the fence to fulfill its purpose. A fence keeps the bad stuff out and lets the good stuff in. And similarly, it keeps the good stuff in and lets the bad stuff out. This is a simple picture of a boundary that keeps us safe and allows us to grow and heal.

The fence that we place around ourselves is under our control, we are guarding. Ourselves, it allows us to decide who or what we take in and who or what we keep out. A fence can keep acquaintances at a safe distance. You don't know them well enough to allow them into your home, much less your yard. And the way some of us treat our yards, that's very important. Close friends and family, you have the boundary in place that allows them to enter into your life. So, let's look at different levels of hurt. And how boundaries help us move beyond that hurts.

First up are the little hurts.

Why is it so easy for little things to get under our skin? Someone cutting us off in traffic. A guy with way too many items to be in the twenty-five items or less line at the grocery store, that drives me nuts. Someone walking slower in front of you or too fast behind you. Noisy eaters' words used incorrectly like hyper bowl. Mispronounced told you I'd hit on that one later. OK. Here's one for me. There is something that I cannot stand, just getting really honest right here, I'm going to step next to the I cannot stand this with all five of my senses. The sight of it, the sound of it, the smell of it, the taste of it, the feel of it. I cannot stand chewing gum. I can't. It disgusts me with all five of my senses. Which is a little problem because my wife is a lifelong gum chewer. She loves it.

These little hurts pet peeves. Like someone cutting us off in traffic, it really shouldn't hurt. It really shouldn't bother us. It's like bumping your elbow ever so gently. And for some reason, it just really hurts. Little things can cause us so much more pain than seems reasonable.

But hitting your funny bone or any other pet peeve, while annoying and sometimes painful, they aren't the end of the world, are they? No, we experience all kinds of hurt in our lives. Last week, Pastor David spoke about pursuing reconciliation. The next step is always establishing the boundary, making sure your fence is in good working order so that you can guard your heart.

I know that stubbing my toe. However painful that might be for a few minutes, is it going to kill me? When someone does something unkind and hurtful that isn't going to hurt me physically. But it does bother me. A rude driver in traffic, an unkind laugh as I walk by thoughtless teasing that hits on something I might feel a little insecure about. We all have those moments.

And for the most part, we're able to brush them off and ignore them. Why? Because the hurt wasn't caused by someone important or close to us. It's much easier, easier to rationalize and sensitivities from a stranger. You don't know what what's going on in their lives, you don't know what they're going through. They could be having the worst day of their life.

Proverbs 12:16 from the NLT says

"a fool is quick tempered, but a wise person stays calm when insulted."

That calm, thoughtful approach is a simple boundary that we set around ourselves. You might have heard the illustration of a garbage truck in a taxi, a garbage truck drives around collecting everyone's rubbish, all their trash and carrying it around all day but a taxi? You take out what you bring in with you. Which will you be in this instance, making your way through the day, taking on someone's bad mood? Another harsh criticism, a thoughtless insult and caring that with you. Or you will you let those little hearts out just as they came in?

Do you see that fence with the gate in your mind? By intentionally choosing ahead of time. To stay calm and not take every little hurt personally, we establish a boundary that earns us the label. Of a wise person right there on the screen, a wise person. I would definitely like to earn that title myself. But what do we do if the hurt is bigger than that? We're moving on to something a little deeper. Sometimes we have hurts that require a bit more healing than a bump or a bruise. If we're using that injury metaphor then we're talking broken bones and prepping for surgery. Something you can't just brush off, you can't stand up, dust yourself off and keep moving.

No, this is going to take some healing. These kinds of hurts aren't caused on accident by a stranger or acquaintance, usually. People like that don't have the social collateral with which to cause us real harm.

Sadly, those big hurts are almost always caused by someone close. A friend, a family member, a co-worker, or manager; usually someone who has spent enough time with us to know our insecurities. Perhaps in a moment of anger, those insecurities are taken advantage of and something especially hurtful is said or done. Now, you're hurt.

Psalms verse 34:18 says,

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

When we are hurt our hearts broken, the first thing we do is turn to our Lord who is close to us in our pain. God begins the healing process even before we feel any different.

But then comes the boundaries. "Guard your hearts," these boundaries protect us as we feel without requiring complete isolation. Imagine two ways to handle a broken bone. Well, first of all, a broken bone. You need two things at the minimum for that to heal, the bone needs to be set so it can heal properly. And it needs to be immobilized. It's got you got to keep the bone from moving around or it's never going to heal and that's a whole lot of pain and suffering. So, two approaches to healing a broken leg. First of all, doctor sets the leg. But to make sure it stays immobile, you don't move. You just lay in one spot. Eventually, that bone will heal, and your muscles will atrophy, and you'll have might have bedsores and not great, not great. Or another way. The much more common way these days, the bone is set. And then there's a brace or a cast applied. Now that leg, that bone is immobilized, but you aren't. You're free to get around or by on crutches or a wheelchair or one of those fun scooter things they have now where you keep one knee up. I honestly really want to try one of those, I don't want to break my leg. I just want to borrow one up and down the halls. Anyone know, OK, you're not stuck in one place for six to eight weeks. Tests allow you to heal by keeping you from sustaining further knocks or jolts. Just imagining that gives me the shivers. And when it comes to hurts. Boundaries allow us to heal by keeping us from sustaining further knocks and jolts to our hearts. We need those boundaries so we can continue. Our lives and our responsibilities. Now, let's put this into perspective of a nonphysical hurt.

If a CEO embezzled huge amounts of money is caught and subsequently fired, should they be forgiven for their wrongdoing? They potentially ruined a lot of people's lives

with their greed. Yet Jesus is clear we forgive 490 times. That's seven times 70. In case you were wondering, Matthew 18:22 last week, when Pastor David is talking about pursuing reconciliation, pursuing. Things being made right. We should absolutely do that; we should absolutely pursue reconciliation.

But here's the boundary. Does the company give the former CEO their job back? No, of course not. While that person may be forgiven, they still have consequences for their actions. They broke the trust that had been placed in them, trust and forgiveness are very different things. Forgiveness is given, but trust is earned.

And in case no one has mentioned this recently. You don't need to immediately trust everyone you meet by welcoming, welcoming them into the boundaries of your personal fence.

Let me say that again, you don't need to immediately trust everyone you meet by welcoming them into the boundaries of your personal fence.

In Matthew, 10:16 from the Amplified Bible, Jesus says,

"Listen carefully: I am sending you out like sheep among wolves, so be wise as serpents and as innocent as doves [having no self-serving agenda.]"

Jesus knew full well that his disciples were going to betray and deny him. That had to have hurt in a way that many of us may not experience as he was facing death, the young men that he had poured his life into for three years abandoned him and even claimed that they didn't know him. Talk about a blow to the spirit.

And Jesus knew full well that each and every one of us would be walking out into the world like sheep among wolves. For most of us, we hear the commands to forgive, but we miss the instructions to do so wisely and carefully. Guarding our hearts.

Let's take this one step further. Imagine a family where the father has a drinking problem, and he strikes his wife. Unfortunately, this is a story that's all too common. In addition to the physical hurt, this understandably breaks his wife's heart, and it starts to take a toll on the children. The emotional damage can be severe.

In order to protect the family. The mother does something very difficult. She kicks out her husband. That is a boundary being put in place with nothing left. The father can realize his faults. But then he returns, begging to be forgiven. Should his wife, the mother of his children, forgive him? For some, this might be a hard pill to swallow, but yes. Over and over and over. Yes, we are to forgive.

Only now there is a boundary in place. Does the mother allow the father back into the house immediately? Absolutely not. No. No. Until there is living proof of his repentance, the father in our story here cannot be allowed to enter the home. The boundary is a result of his actions, and it will protect his wife and children from his own lack of control.

That boundary that fence creates the space for the family to recover and forces the one at fault to stand alone and face the consequences of their actions.

In case this isn't clear, I want to state this plainly, if you forgive someone without establishing a boundary, you are not helping them. When we sin, God absolutely forgives us. We are assured of his grace, but he also allows us to experience the consequences of our actions and we have to do likewise.

So, if someone has hurt you, a boundary is necessary. And please if you are being abused physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually, get help. Call the police if you need to. In doing so, you are setting up a boundary in your own life in order to guard your heart. Suffering in silence under abuse isn't wholly it isn't persecution, it's wrong. We, as the church must stand against abuse in any form.

God didn't create us to be impenetrable juggernauts. We aren't designed to handle everything and never be hurt. We're made in the image of God and the Bible tells us in Genesis 6 that his heart was grieved and filled with pain.

On the other hand, we aren't created to be walked on like doormats. Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount, the meek shall inherit the Earth. He didn't say that the weak shall inherit the Earth, but the meek, the meek are not weak. The word meek comes from the middle English used to describe a stallion that had been broken.

A wild stallion is a very strong and dangerous animal. Yet when it has been trained or broken, it would then be described as meek. Does that mean the horse lost any of its power or strength? Not in the slightest. The stallion has not lost an ounce of strength. It's just now under control.

Forgiving someone and setting up a boundary takes strength. Building a good fence with a solid gate around yourself requires a bit of thought, a bit of care and sometimes a lot of strength. It can be hard to say no to someone you've spent your whole life saying yes to.

But when you're hurt... Healthy boundaries give you the room. To breathe. And the space to heal, moving beyond the hurt.