

# 9. HOW SAFE ARE YOU?

*Certain types of anxiety stem from a lack of boundaries, or the presence of conflicting boundaries*



#NCSAMENTALHEALTHDEVOTIONS

With COVID-19, we have also been faced with other kinds of boundaries. COVID-19 has brought boundaries into our lives which we did not have before. Some of these boundaries are good, some of them not so good. Some of the good ones for example are that you should wash your hands; if you have any symptoms of COVID-19, you should isolate; keep public gatherings to a minimum and then only have a few people there. When we go to the shops, we should keep a safe distance from other people and we should wear masks. If you have any symptoms or if you are coughing or sneezing, cough into a tissue or into your arm. Discard the tissue afterwards. When you use a handwash, use one with 70% alcohol because it will kill all the germs. Yes, these are all good boundaries, boundaries that are there to keep us safe.

On the other hand, the government has brought in some rules that are, in my opinion, not so logical and are not really there to keep us safe. For example, I heard it was said that you are not allowed to mow your front lawn. If you have a small piece of lawn just outside your gate where people usually sit, you are not allowed to mow it. You will actually get a fine if you do that. When you go to the shop, you can have two people in the car, but one must sit in the front seat and the other one must sit in the back seat, which makes no sense. I mean, me and my husband are sleeping together in the same bed and now we are not allowed to sit on two chairs next to each other. We are allowed to stand next to each other at the shop, but we are not allowed to sit next to each other in the car. These are silly rules that do not really seem to be keeping us safe, but somebody decided to make these rules.

**IN EVERYDAY LIFE WE COME  
ACROSS BOUNDARIES.  
BOUNDRIES AT WORK,  
BOUNDARIES IN OUR COUNTRY  
OUR CHURCH AND OUR HOMES  
AND SCHOOLS. SOME OF THESE  
BOUNDARIES ARE GOOD, SOME OF  
THEM NOT SO GOOD.**

## HOW SAFE ARE YOU?

*Psalms 104:9: "You set a boundary that they may not pass over, so that they will not return to cover the earth."*

Are you one of those people who struggle to say no, or to disagree with somebody when their opinions are not that valid? Do you often find yourself saying **yes** to something, when deep down, your emotions and thoughts are screaming **NO!**? If so, you are probably struggling with setting and maintaining boundaries in your life.

God is into boundaries as the verse said. We read in Psalms that He has set a boundary to protect the world from the sea. God has given us moral boundaries to obey, like the Ten Commandments. He has given us health boundaries like we find in the book of Leviticus. He even mentioned physical boundaries in the sense that He has set boundaries in place in nature. He set boundaries for the ocean. He set boundaries in the sky, in the heavens. Imagine for a moment that there were no physical boundaries in nature. Imagine if the sea was just left to do whatever it wanted, what would this earth look like? It would probably be covered with water like the verse says. What if the stars and the planets did not have set orbits or paths to travel in, in other words, no boundaries? Our earth would probably have been knocked off its axis by now.

God is a God of boundaries. The theme of keeping His laws, regulations and commandments permeates the themes of the whole Bible. These regulations and commandments are not there to restrict us or to spoil our fun. They are there to keep us safe and to protect us. God wants us to be safe.

**GOD IS A GOD OF BOUNDARIES. PSALMS SAYS THAT HE HAS SET A BOUNDARY TO PROTECT THE WORLD FROM THE SEA. GOD HAS ALSO GIVEN US MORAL BOUNDARIES TO OBEY, LIKE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.**



What do we do when there are these types of silly rules imposed on us because of COVID-19, or generally in our own lives or in our families, or even at work? What do we do with these rules that make no sense and are not really there to keep us safe?

The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 2:13-14, what we should do: *"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one of authority, or to governments as sent by Him, for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right, you may silence the ignorance of foolish men."* Even though some rules may be silly rules, God is calling upon us to obey them.

However, Peter continues to say in the book of Acts 5:29: *"We ought to obey God rather than man"*. It may sound like a bit of a contradiction. On the one hand Peter tells us to submit ourselves to human institutions and their rules and to authorities for God's sake, but on the other hand he says we should obey God rather than man. This however is not really a contradiction. What Peter is basically saying, is as long as the laws of man do not go against the law of God, we should obey them. We should submit to them. Do not be rebellious and refuse doing these things because they do not make sense to you. If your life is not in danger and if they are not infringing on your moral boundaries or they are not against God's boundaries, then you should obey these rules. In other words, Peter is saying that God's rules come first and secondly, even if the civil laws infringe on our personal boundaries, we should obey them.

Notice that I said *personal* boundaries not *spiritual* boundaries. Let me explain.

WHEN THEN THE LAWS OF THE  
COUNTRY ARE IN CONFLICT WITH  
GODS LAWS, WE OUGHT TO OBEY  
GOD RATHER THAN MAN.

Personal boundaries are things you want to do, like cutting your grass. It has nothing to do with your spirituality. It has nothing to do with being safe. It is just a matter of something you want to do. We need to put God's boundaries first, civil laws second and thereafter personal boundaries. It is clear that boundaries have their origin in three major sources: *my own* personal boundaries, boundaries brought to us *by others* such as civil or communal and work policies, and boundaries brought to us by God. We call these *personal, communal or civil* and *spiritual* boundaries.

All of this got me thinking what boundaries really are and what they do within our lives. Psychology says that proper boundaries can help to reduce stress and anxiety and assist with our feelings of lack of control. Something we all experience at this moment are feelings of anxiety and stress and lack of control.

You need to stop and ask yourself whether your anxiety is self-inflicted? Are you experiencing anxiety because of the situation or are you experiencing anxiety because of the self-inflicted lack of boundaries? In other words, did you not set sufficient boundaries to keep yourself safe during this time? It is understandable that there are some things you cannot control, but sometimes you struggle with setting boundaries and that increases the anxiety that is already there. Something that is bad, then becomes worse.

Boundaries have two **functions**. Firstly boundaries are there to keep a person safe and secondly boundaries are there to *define who you are*. You always need to ask yourself if the boundary that you are setting, this rule that you have, this thing that you are trying to enforce onto others or onto yourself; is it really keeping you safe? Is it for your best interest?

**PROPER BOUNDARIES CAN HELP  
TO REDUCE STRESS AND ANXIETY.**

Boundaries also define *who you are*. It tells people what you will allow and what not. In other words, are you a person that will allow smoking or are you a non-smoker? Are you a person that allows people to swear at you or not? So it really defines who you are.

Boundaries also indicate **how close** you allow others to get to you physically, emotionally and spiritually. Some people call boundaries the rules of life, in other words, what you allow and what you do not allow according to who you are. Remember that boundaries come from three major sources namely your *personal boundaries*, *God's boundaries* and *communal boundaries*.

Anxiety usually stems from a conflict in boundaries. In other words, if your personal boundaries, your spiritual boundaries, the boundaries of others and the laws of the country do not correspond with one another, there will be anxiety. What happens when you have a specific way of doing things, but God's laws are saying something different, or other people's opinions are different, or perhaps the country's laws forbid you to do that which you want to do? Then there is confusion. Then there are many voices coming to your mind, telling you what to do. This can cause anxiety within you. As a matter of fact, tremendous anxiety. Especially if you are a **yes** person who cannot say **no**.

When I started off, I asked the question who of you struggle with saying no? Many of us are struggling to say no. We tend to say yes to situations we feel uncomfortable with. If you are a people pleaser and there are many voices in your head telling you what to do and how to act and how not to act, you are going to start feeling anxious.

**BOUNDARIES DEFINE WHO YOU ARE, THEY TELL OTHERS WHAT YOU ALLOW AND WHAT YOU DON'T ALLOW IN YOUR LIFE.**



People pleasers want to keep people happy. They want to avoid conflict. They do not want to go into a confrontation.

Unfortunately even though they say yes and they manage to avoid the confrontation, there is a fight happening inside them because of their spiritual and personal boundaries that are being conflicted.

So, who do you listen to? God has given you four things in life. Yourself, other people, possessions and Himself. These are the four things you truly possess while you are here on this earth. You need to prioritise which of these four comes first.

Let us firstly look at *possessions* and things. The Bible says that possessions do not really feature, they are not really important. It says, *“do not store up treasures for yourself on earth where rust and moth doth corrupt and where thieves break in and steal. Store up a treasure for yourselves in heaven, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* How do we store up treasures in heaven? By investing our means in the cause of God to aid to the salvation of souls we will be happy. Then we will have our hearts in heaven. What the verse basically says is that we need to use those things God has given us for the salvation of souls. In that way, we are storing up treasures in heaven. Therefore, the only aspect that makes possessions important, is whether we are using them to save souls or not. If not, God says, put the possessions out of your mind.

That basically leaves us with three things. We are left with God, ourselves and others. The important question here is: ‘Whose boundaries come first?’ It is obvious because as Christians we know that God said: “My boundaries come first.”

**PEOPLE PLEASERS WANT TO KEEP  
PEOPLE HAPPY. THEY WANT TO AVOID  
CONFLICT. THEY DO NOT WANT TO GO  
INTO A CONFRONTATION AND OFTEN  
SAY YES WHEN THEY SHOULD BE  
SAYING NO.**

We need to place God first. Revelation 1:8 states: *"I am the first and the last," says the Lord God Almighty, who is, who was, and who is to come.*" Indeed, He is the first. Not just the first from the foundation of this earth, but He should be the first in our lives. The first to give an opinion. The first who we go to when we are feeling stressed and anxious. Everything in our lives should be moulded around *'Me and the things of My laws and My principles'*, says God.

If God then is first, who comes second, me or others? In 2 Corinthians 8:5 Paul is speaking about his experience when he was in Macedonia. He was writing to the church of Corinth and he said: "It was more than we could have hoped for! First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God's will, they gave themselves to us as well." With this Paul is saying that the church in Macedonia gave themselves to God first and secondly they gave themselves to Paul, and then only they took care of themselves. It sounds as if Paul is saying that others come second. But there is a problem with this. If we put people second, this means that we have to give up our own boundaries. People pleasers are usually the ones that put other people's wants before their own. Notice what I am saying. Putting other people's **wants** before their own. I did not say **needs**.

God expect us to put other people's **needs** before our own. Unfortunately we often suppress our own needs for other people's **wants**. We put other people's wants in the place of our needs because we have this idea in our heads that we have to put others before ourselves. Let me explain. I said there are boundaries that are kind of silly. Boundaries that do not really protect. I'd like to call them wants. I want to eat my food this way. I want you to do things, this way.

GOD EXPECT US TO PUT OTHER  
PEOPLE'S NEEDS BEFORE OUR  
OWN. UNFORTUNATELY WE OFTEN  
SUPPRESS OUR OWN NEEDS FOR  
OTHER PEOPLE'S WANTS.



That is not a need. It is not something that has to be obeyed or has to be put into place. Oftentimes if we are people pleasers, we tend to do this. We do not look at our own needs. We satisfy the selfish longings of others which is not in God's plan for us, or for them.

My suggestion is that the *person* or the *thing* that should come second is your own person. Your own boundaries and your own safety. Remember that boundaries are there to protect you. You need to protect yourself first before you can really protect others. Make sure you are implementing your boundaries and that you are well looked-after so that you can also work to the benefit of other people and their lives.

Let me demonstrate why I say that God should come first, then self, then others. Remember, I am not saying being selfish. I am not saying wants and silly rules and regulations. I am talking about needs, about true things that are there to protect us. Here comes the Bible's guidance in Mark 12:30-31: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second most important command is this: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' There is no other commandment more important than these two."* Look very carefully, Jesus says this is the greatest command we all should obey. What is this verse saying?

I remember when I was younger I used to chant this Christian song's lyrics that says: *'Others, Lord, yes others, let this my motto be; help me to live for others, that I might live for Thee.'* I used to really try to live for others and put myself out of my mind, which is a good thing to practise. This song speaks of the needs of others.

**WHOSE BOUNDARIES COME FIRST AND SECOND ACCORDING TO THIS VERSE? LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.**

Not the wants, not the luxuries or the silly rules and things that they do not really need. Unfortunately I started putting other people's wants before my own needs, and often I would deter my own needs for them. This eventually brought irritation and resentment and thoughts and feelings inside me that were not good. Thoughts and feelings that were not good towards these other people or towards God.

We tend to say first God, then others and then myself. Even the verse in Mark 12 seems to promote that you should love the Lord your God as number one and then you should love others as you love yourself (others second), and yourself last. But look very carefully. It is God, yourself and then others. You should love them like yourself. If you do not first love yourself and protect yourself, you cannot love them and protect them like yourself, if there is no self to begin with.

I am not saying live a selfish, self-centered life, never thinking about others and just taking care of yourself and then perhaps later you can consider others. That is not what the Bible is saying. It is talking about living a well-balanced life, setting appropriate boundaries. Finding that peace in God first, and then offering it to others. In other words, the Bible is saying we need to learn from God about His boundaries. We need to experience God for ourselves first, then we can go to others and we can share His love with them. We need to first be healthy and loved and take care of ourselves by putting God's boundaries in place before we can show others how to be safe, healthy and loved and how to put the boundaries from God into their lives.

God calls us to be examples. We need to live the lives that others need to live.

**LIVE A WELL-BALANCED LIFE,  
SETTING APPROPRIATE  
BOUNDARIES. FINDING PEACE IN  
GOD FIRST, AND THEN OFFERING  
IT TO OTHERS.**

He showed us that it is okay to sometimes say no, while other times we do say yes, depending on what is asked of us. Sometimes we place aside our own personal boundaries, those silly boundaries that do not really make sense, and we keep God's spiritual boundaries. Do not misunderstand me, not all our personal boundaries are silly, we do have personal boundaries that are good. Jesus came and He showed us how to do this. Jesus knew how to say no. Jesus also knew how to say yes.

One day, when Jesus was in the town of Capernaum, He heard that Peter's mother-in-law was very ill. Jesus went and He healed her. After that, many people flocked to the house to be healed and He spent the whole night healing them. When Sabbath started, the people went away. After everybody had left, Jesus went to pray until early morning. After the Sabbath, He healed people again. Early the next morning the disciples came and they asked Him to please come back to the house to heal more people. Jesus replied, "**No, there are other people who also need me**" (Mark 1:29-31).

Jesus lived a balanced life. He knew that He could not be everything for everyone. Although He **is** everything for everyone. In his human form, He knew that He had to take time to live that balanced life, to say that He has done what He could and He was going somewhere else.

Jesus also knew how to take care of Himself **physically**. He knew how to say that He was going to take some sleep, going to take some **rest**. He knew how to say that He needed some time alone. He often went walking alone.

JESUS KNEW HOW TO SAY NO.  
JESUS ALSO KNEW HOW TO SAY  
YES. WE MUST LEARN FROM HIM  
WHEN AND HOW TO SAY NO.



The Bible tells us that Jesus told the rich young man: *“Go and sell everything you have and give the money to the poor and you will have riches in heaven.”* It appears as if this act is putting others first, but truthfully, this act is a blessing for self – a learning of humility and dependence on God and of growing our Christian graces. What Jesus was really saying to the young man was to go and practise to be a good Christian. Put good characteristics in yourself, work on yourself and by doing that, other people will also be blessed.

When you are in an aeroplane and it loses altitude and is about to crash, the first rule of conduct is to put on your own oxygen mask and get out your own life jacket and put it on. Then only you proceed to help others. If you don't do this and you suffocate, you cannot save someone else and you both end up dying. There is no point in that. Jesus tried to demonstrate this principle to us.

In our minds, we often misunderstand the principles of the Bible. We've developed this thought of becoming martyrs, believing that we must give up everything for others. Even if we burn out, even if we feel anxious, even if we end up losing sleep or a meal or don't have time to rest, if it will benefit others, then it is our duty. Even if that should be their wants and not their needs, we should do that because it is our duty to save them. This is not the truth. We are not called to do this. This type of thinking and behaviour will turn out a curse and also a disservice to God and all that He stands for. It is completely contrary to what God is trying to do in us. God wants us to be His ambassadors, to show others how to live a well-balanced life with good boundaries.

When Jesus came to this earth, He set a perfect example for us on how to conduct ourselves.

**GOD WANTS US TO BE HIS  
AMBASSADORS, TO SHOW OTHERS  
HOW TO LIVE A WELL-BALANCED LIFE  
WITH GOOD BOUNDARIES.**

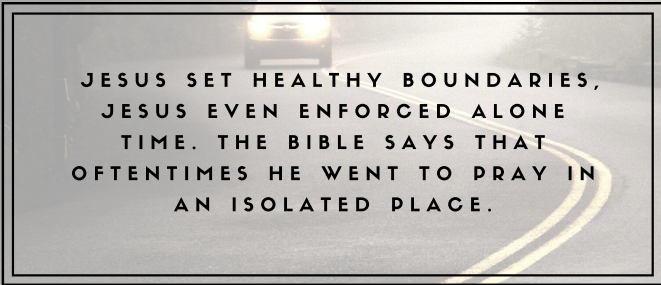
In other words, He set certain boundaries for Himself, saying that He was not just there to preach and teach and perform miracles, but He also needed to take care of Himself bodily.

Sometimes people came and told Him what to do (**manipulation**). The disciples really tried to push Jesus into power, to take the throne of David. In Matthew 16:23 Jesus sidestepped these attempts by the disciples indirectly and told them: *"No, this is not going to happen."*

His family felt very **entitled**. They felt that they earned a special place in the life of Jesus. They tried to push their own personal boundaries, their own personal wants. In Matthew 12:46 Jesus said to the people: *"Not everybody who says they are My family, is My family, but everybody that does the Word of God, is my family."*

Jesus also protected Himself against physical abuse. Luke 4:28-30 tells us of the crowd who was trying to stone Him (**abuse**), and He fought His way through the crowd.

Isn't this interesting, how Jesus also set **healthy** boundaries? Jesus even practised **social distancing**. The Bible says that oftentimes He went to pray in an isolated place. He also took time to be with close friends and not just be with big crowds. He learned to say no to big crowds wanting to follow Him. Often He would just take His inner circle, the three disciples, with Him. He did certain miracles in secret. He did not blurt it out to the world. He also sometimes told His disciples to leave Him, to go across the Lake of Galilee and wait for Him on the other side so that He had time to be alone.



JESUS SET HEALTHY BOUNDARIES,  
JESUS EVEN ENFORCED ALONE  
TIME. THE BIBLE SAYS THAT  
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AN ISOLATED PLACE.

He sometimes even just distanced Himself in space, where He would go and sit on a boat and preach to the people on the shore. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees at times for their strict rules that were not really there to keep people safe.

But then, on the other hand, Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors. He said **yes** because He knew He could do good for them. He allowed an unclean woman to touch Him, which was completely against the rules and regulations of the time. He allowed little children to come to Him when others said no.

Jesus knew who He was and therefore He knew how to set His boundaries. Some days He was alone. Other days he fed crowds of thousands. Some days He rebuked the strict rules of the Pharisees, while on the other hand He would admonish the disciples and tell them to pay tax.

Jesus is our perfect example. We should ask ourselves whether we are experiencing anxiety because of a lack of boundaries? Are we perhaps doing boundaries very one-sided or are we struggling with finding the balance of setting healthy boundaries?

Remember to put God's boundaries in your life first. After that you need to have good personal boundaries. Not selfish boundaries, not wants, but needs. Put those boundaries second. Take care of yourself in terms of health, like Jesus took care of Himself and then you will be in a better position to take care of those around you.

If you are experiencing a lot of inside anger, the possibility is there that somebody or something is disturbing your boundaries.

**REMEMBER TO PUT GOD'S  
BOUNDARIES IN YOUR LIFE FIRST.**



Take some time to re-evaluate what those disturbances are. Are they in line with God's boundaries? Are you truly keeping yourself safe, or are you allowing things such as silly rules to distract you? Once you are safe and you have implemented God's rules into your life, then go out and do the same for others.

There is a promise that when we do this, it will remove anger and anxiety and it will allow us to teach others as well as ourselves about God and what He wants for our lives. It will help us to be a well-balanced people who is not over-taxed and who is safe and well-balanced for the glory of God.

**GODS BOUNDARIES WILL HELP  
YOU TO BE A WELL-BALANCED  
PERSON WHO IS NOT OVER-TAXED  
AND WHO IS SAFE AND WELL-  
BALANCED FOR THE GLORY OF  
GOD.**

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*Northern Conference, Pastoral Counselling Department  
Revive, Refresh, Restore  
flemingn@nc.adventist.org  
Cell: +27836584296  
Author: Nandi Fleming  
Editors: Kobus & Adele Beukes*