

Do I Have Healthy Boundaries?

1. Warm up: On Sunday we talked about the power of habits, both large and small. As we delve into this subject, let's start small. There are a lot of little things that we do habitually that are part of our regular daily or weekly routine – things we do on autopilot, but really miss when they don't happen. What's something like that for you?
2. Sunday we resumed our study of the life of Moses. We've already seen how the Israelites escaped slavery in Egypt, fled into the wilderness, and crossed the Red Sea. From there they made their way to the holy mountain – Mt. Sinai – to seek guidance. For generations, as slaves, they'd been forced to be, do, and live however their masters dictated. But now, newly liberated, they finally had the opportunity to decide for themselves what kind of people they were going to be and how they would structure their lives. So Moses went up to the mountain top to pray and to ask God for guidance. Read Exodus 20:1-17, selected verses as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Rules, rightly understood, are healthy boundaries God gives us to help us live a balanced, joyful, satisfying life. But that's not how many of us were introduced to rules. Many of us were raised in church or home environments filled with religious rules governing almost everything we did. Often we were taught we had to keep all those rules or incur God's wrath. Did any of us have that kind of experience? If so, how did it affect you and your relationship with God?
 - b. Which of the Ten Commandments do you find most challenging?
3. The Bible is full of passages that offer guidelines for healthy living. Beyond the Ten Commandments there are also things like: love your neighbor as yourself, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, be generous, be patient, forgive those who sin against you, etc., etc. All of which raises the question, why should we?
 - a. Proverbs 7:14 answers that question like this: "There is a way that seems right to a person, but the end thereof is destruction." Jesus said something very similar, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many go down it." Matthew 7:14. What insights do these verses offer about why spiritual rules are so important?
 - b. Why do you think so many people ignore spiritual rules and choose the path of destruction?
 - c. On Sunday Jeff suggested that the principal purpose of spiritual rules is not to keep God happy, but rather to enable us to strike a healthy balance between impulse and intention, so we can live beautiful, satisfying lives, rather than behaving in ways that are destructive to us and others. Jeff shared a story about a

time when, as a young lawyer, he made a big mistake and came very close to breaking the Ninth Commandment by falsely blaming someone else for his mistake. He talked about how good he felt when he ultimately decided to do the hard thing, be honest, and own his mistake. He said, “Afterward I felt really good about myself. When the chips were down, when the stakes were high, I lived my values. And it felt good to be me. It felt wonderful to be me. What a buzz!” Think of a time you did something that was really hard simply because it was the right thing to do. What happened? Afterward, how did that make you feel? Did doing the right thing enhance your life or make it worse?

- d. Jeff also talked about how bad he would have felt about himself if he had lied about his mistake. We’ve all had times when we did something terrible. Think of a time you did something really bad. What happened? Afterward, how did that make you feel? Did doing the wrong thing enhance your life or make it worse?
4. Even though spiritual rules, i.e., healthy moral boundaries, are important, it’s also important to remember that rules are not the highest authority in our lives. The New Testament teaches that the Voice of the Holy Spirit, is our ultimate authority. E.g., Galatians 5:18; II Corinthians 3:6, 17.
 - a. Jeff gave an example of how, if we had undocumented people in our congregation and an ICE agent asked him about that, he would lie and say we didn’t, and if necessary even swear to God he was telling the truth. Jeff said he thinks that’s what Jesus would want him to do. Do you think he’s right? Why or why not?
 - b. When in your life have you intentionally transgressed a rule found in the Bible because you felt the Voice of the Spirit telling you to do so?
 5. Sunday’s sermon ended with a conversation about how hard it is to break bad habits and establish new healthy boundaries. Studies show that 95% of the decisions we make each day are made automatically subconsciously based on habitual patterns, i.e., neural pathways in our brain, that we’ve established.
 - a. What are the implications of that for us – and for how to create change in our lives?
 - b. The only way to change a bad habit embedded in a strong negative neural pathway (e.g., impatient anger) and replace it with a new healthier pathway (e.g., patience and gentleness) is to consciously stop using the angry pathway and practice redirecting yourself and empowering a new patient pathway. Each time you do that, your anger pathway will grow incrementally weaker and your patience pathway stronger. In your own life right now, where do you most need to disable a negative pattern and establish a new healthy boundary? Describe the negative pattern you want to disable and the new healthy pattern you want to create. Are you prepared to prayerfully, persistently set about doing that?

Exodus 20:1-17, selected verses

1 God spoke these words, saying, 2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. 7 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.

8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. 10 In it you shall do no work.

12 Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you. 13 You shall not murder. 14 You shall not commit adultery. 15 You shall not steal. 16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house or spouse or servants, nor their ox, or donkey, or anything that your neighbor's."