



# BOUNDARIES IN COLLEGE MINISTRY

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College ministry leaders are notorious for boundary issues. I came on staff right after being a student and had a rough transition setting the right boundaries between myself and the students, but even now I never have outgrown the need to set healthy boundaries.

Ask yourself these questions to assess how healthy your boundaries in life are.

Do you have a hard time saying no?

Do you have a hard time when people say no to you?

Do you often find yourself overbooked?

Is your joy dependent on how someone else feels?

There are four things you need to know in order to set healthy boundaries. Many of these insights were drawn from the must-read book *Boundaries: By Henry Cloud and John Townsend*.

## 1. Know Your Goal

Jesus summarized our purpose this way, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. Matt 22:37–40

You can't love others as yourself until you've settled who gets your worship. The biggest boundary problems come when we start worshiping the people we love. Instead of getting our love, and satisfaction from God we seek to get that out in the people we love. The problem is that they were never designed to satisfy us! Like two ticks and no dog we end up sucking each other dry. Sometimes we worship others by putting unrealistic expectations on them, other times we accept the role of God in someone's life because it feels good to be a hero at first.

We have to decide who we are ultimately trying to please, Paul said, Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. Gal 1:10

Whose approval are you living for? God or people? If your main goal is the approval of others than you will always have unhealthy boundaries because you will never want to disappoint them. Also, if you start setting healthy boundaries you will disappoint some people. You get to choose who you would rather disappoint, God or people.



## 2. Know Your Role

In Galatians Paul gives us specific instructions on how to help people, Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ. Gal 6:1-2 Like Forky in Toy Story 4, some people keep jumping in the trash, and those of us who are stronger in our faith must humbly and gently pull them out. But we must be careful that we don't start enjoying the trash too.

The word "Burden" here refers to a heavyweight beyond what they can bear on their own. The law of Christ refers to when Jesus said, As I have loved you, so you must love one another. John 13:34 Loving like Jesus requires sacrifice. Jesus bore the burden of our sin that we couldn't bear on the cross. When we help someone who can't help themselves, we are loving the way Jesus loved.

Paul continued, If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load. Galatians 6:3-5

As soon as we start seeing ourselves as the savior we are in trouble. Each of us must stand before God and answer to him for what he's given us to do. While we should carry each other's burdens we shouldn't carry someone else's load. What's the difference?

Again, the "burden" refers to something too heavy to carry alone. The "load" is the responsibilities that only they can carry. The load is like a soldier's pack, Just as each soldier must bear his own pack, we all have responsibilities only we can fulfill. Healthy boundaries come from learning the difference between a load and a burden. We must each carry our own load, and then help bear the burdens of others.

What's your load? What has God given you to do? My Load:  
Take care of my own spiritual, physical and emotional health and growth.  
Make money to support myself.  
Invest in and take care of my family.  
Faithfully fulfill whatever commitments I have already made.  
Play my part in God's mission through the church.

This is every believer's load. On top of these basic commitments, each of us has a unique set of responsibilities that God has given us. Those who carry their load well are rewarded, but be aware that often the reward is an increase in that load! As you seek to carry each other's burdens, you must assess how it will impact your ability to carry your own load.

A few verses later Paul encourages us to seize opportunities to help others, Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Gal 6:9-10 I like the way John Wesley said it, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."



This doesn't sound like very good boundaries! What are John Wesley and Paul getting at? I believe when you get boundaries right it will allow you to maximize your impact as you focus on spending most of your time doing what only you can do. Boundaries are not to be used to protect your selfish interests; they are there to maximize your impact for God's kingdom. Ironically by trying to do everything you will end up impacting fewer people.

Also being tired is not an excuse for giving up on doing good and seizing the right opportunities! But also notice even in Paul's instruction he's showing a need for a boundary by saying, "especially to those who belong to the family of believers." If you have to choose, start by helping a fellow believer. Christ-followers are burden bearers. The Christian life is a life of service, and if we are to follow Christ we must sacrifice. Boundaries are not to be put in place to keep us from fulfilling our calling but to help live it.

### **3. Know When To Say No.**

Your entire life consists of what you say yes to and what you say no to. Every time you say yes to something, you are saying no to something else. We must learn to say no for a greater yes. It's often been said that the good is the enemy of the best. You can fill your life with good things and miss God's best for your life.

There are two extremes to this. Some people hear this and say "I'm going to start saying no to everything," and they end up living very self-centered lives. Don't use boundaries as an excuse to be selfish.

Others fail to set the right boundaries and float around never making a big impact. The world is not changed by people to dabble in a lot of things, but by those who focus on a few life-changing things. To be effective you must be selective. Your no is not for self-protection, but for service of God and others. We say no to some burdens, so we can say yes to our load. And when I carry my load, I am freed up to bear the burdens of others in greater ways. Just because something needs to be done doesn't mean it needs to be done by you.

### **4. Know Your Gifts**

Usually, God aligns our gifting with our calling. Paul said, For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. In Ephesians 2:10, we see that God handcrafted you with a specific purpose in mind. Nothing was an accident. He gave you the personality, looks, experiences, and abilities that you have for a mission only you can fulfill.

Peter said each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10 God's given you the grace to do what only you can do, to help fulfill God's mission through the church. The more you know yourself, the more opportunity you will have to specialize in your unique contribution. Part of the maturing process is learning to set boundaries in order to serve better using our gifts.

Your mission to reach college students matters more than you know. Don't let the expectations of others stop you from using your gifts on campus to reach, disciple and send as many students as possible.



Resources for Church and  
Campus Collegiate Ministries

Ask yourself:

What is my goal in life really? Am I living to please God or am I living to please people?

What is my role? Am I carrying the load God has for me?

What are my gifts? How can I use them to help lift the burdens of others around me?

*This is a resource that was put together as part of the training process for Campus Multiplication Network. The vision of CMN is to equip leaders who desire to plant new ministries on college campuses until there is no campus left without a multiplying gospel movement. We provide training and coaching for collegiate ministry leaders who are looking to accelerate evangelistic growth and start new multiplying campus ministries. For more information, you can email [campusmultiplicationnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:campusmultiplicationnetwork@gmail.com)*