



Physical boundaries mark a visible property line indicating that someone holds the deed. In the emotional and spiritual world, boundaries are just as real, but often harder to see. In reality, these boundaries define your reality, your soul if you will, and they help you guard and maintain it.

### Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

### Reflections

The two-year old colt pranced excitedly on the lead-line as the handler led him to the pasture. Once released, the horse stood still for a moment, taking it all in. Ahead lay the expanse of rolling hills and lush grass. Suddenly, he bolted and quickly his stride covered the ground before him. What a sight! The exhilaration of freedom; the beauty of being all that he was born to be.

Without a care, and sadly without any experience, he ran and ran. Then he hit the fence. He didn't even see the rows of tight wire. In his excitement, he had only focused on the possibilities of the land ahead of him. The impact caused the heavy wire to tear deeply into his chest. When the stable managers found him, he had already suffered such damage that he needed to be euthanized immediately. His potential was tragically ended and his owner's dreams were crushed. The careless handler learned an unforgettable lesson about helping a young horse understand its limits.

Experienced equestrians understand that horses need to be shown the fence line so that they respect it. Sometimes a

handler will lead a young horse around the perimeter of the field so they clearly see the fence. Often an inexperienced horse is turned out with a mature and sensible horse who essentially *shows them the ropes* about limits and dangers within the field.

***As we learn to navigate boundaries, we have access to the freedom God intends for us, yet remain protected from physical, emotional, and spiritual injury.***

We also have a need to learn our limits. God designed boundaries for our safety and health. Boundaries —knowing when to say "yes" and when to say "no" — identify what is our responsibility and protect us from outside dangers. They define us and help us to separate ourselves from the needs that others unrealistically place on us. As we learn to navigate boundaries, we have access to the freedom God intends for us, yet remain protected from physical, emotional, and spiritual injury.

From the very beginning of the Bible, God draws clear boundaries between

light and dark, right and wrong, good and evil, self and other. Often the Christian life is confused with pleasing others, something that is misinterpreted as pleasing to God. In this *Boundaries* series, we'll take a deeper look at what scripture really says about healthy boundaries with ourselves, family, friends, and at our work.

Faced with setting boundaries, we ask:

- Can I set limits and still be a loving person?
- What if someone is upset or hurt by my boundaries?
- Why do I feel guilty or afraid when I set boundaries?
- Aren't boundaries selfish?
- Is it difficult for me to hear "no" from other people?
- Do I tend to control other people when I don't get what I want?

What do your answers to these questions tell you about yourself? Are you at risk of hitting the fence line from bad choices or an over-functioning life? What needs to change so that you can run within the freedom God has given you?

— Karen Heist

## Readings

*Don't have a Bible? Access the readings at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).*

### Sunday, September 23

**Genesis 1:1-5** Healthy, biblical boundaries are designed by God in love for our protection to clearly delineate what is our responsibility and what is someone else's responsibility. It is important to remember that God rules over both sides of the boundary. What boundary did God create in this first chapter of Genesis? What other boundaries do you see in God's creation? How are they useful? What does this tell you about why boundaries are important to God?

### Monday, September 24

**Romans 8:32-39** In the physical world, boundaries are easy to see. In the spiritual world, boundaries are just as real. What kind of boundaries exist in the spiritual world? Why are they be important?

### Tuesday, September 25

**Proverbs 4:23** Boundaries keep us safe. God wants us to protect the great treasure that He has designed in us. What happens when we do not guard our hearts? Consider your life. What is stealing your energy, effectiveness, peace of mind, health, or hopes? What do you need to protect?

### Wednesday, September 26

**Ephesians 4:22-29** We are responsible for everything that exist within our boundaries:our feelings, thoughts, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, choices, desires, and more. What personal boundaries do you see reinforced in this passage? What is within your boundaries that you need to take greater responsibility for?

### Thursday, September 27

**Nehemiah 13:15-22** Nehemiah saw the decline of the city because people did not observe the Sabbath and spend dedicated time with God. What did he do? Boundaries are not meant to wall us off from the world. Our fences should have gates so that we can let out the bad when it is inside and let in the good to build us up. What is God prompting you to take in or let out?

### Friday, September 28

**Galatians 6:1-5** What message in today's scripture could get misinterpreted into poor boundaries? Why do you think Christians get particularly confused about boundaries? Review the bulleted questions in the Reflection on page 1. Which of these relate to your life? How do you think you became confused about these boundaries? What boundaries would you like to improve as we progress through this study?

### Saturday, September 29

**Proverbs 14:10; John 14:25-27** Our personhood has physical and spiritual boundaries that we must face. No one can fully understand us except our Creator. While we are set apart from others, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit is our guide and comforter. What joy or burden do you need to share only with the Holy Spirit today? Take a moment to pray about this.

## Great Resources

**Take 4 minutes to look at this video to prompt family or small group discussion: "The concept of boundaries"**

<http://www.cloudtownsend.com/videosever/video.php?clip=CCNT2048>

Worth the read —

**Boundaries: When to say yes, how to say no, to take control of your life.** Henry Cloud & John Townsend. Zondervan, 1992.