

CAN YOU RELATE?

BOUNDARIES

It had been a busy few weeks. Nancy had been working long hours at the office, and I'd been buried in sermon preparation for the holidays. We were both feeling tired, but more than that we were feeling disconnected. We had become the proverbial "ships passing in the night". A kiss good morning, a kiss good night and an occasional text during the day was about the extent of our relationship. And so, we planned dinner out together at a new restaurant in the area.

Just a few days before that dinner date I ran into a friend that I hadn't seen in a while. As we caught up he told me about some of the difficult times that he and his wife were facing with one of their kids. It had been a really rough time for them. During the conversation, it came out that Nancy and I were going to have dinner together at that new restaurant in town and my friend immediately lit up. He said, "We've been meaning to go there too. How about we join you? It would be great to catch up, and we'd really value your input on how to deal with our son?"

Pause right there. Can you feel what I was feeling in that moment? Can you feel the tension? I really want time alone with my wife, but I also want to support my friend. How do I balance those two things? Hold onto that story. I'll come back to it later.

We're in a message series entitled "Can You Relate". We're exploring the Bible's practical wisdom for maintaining healthy relationships. Today I want to talk about developing healthy boundaries, boundaries that can help us to navigate the tension we often struggle with between our needs and someone else's needs. To get at that please open your bible to Proverbs 4:20-23 and let's read these wise verses together [NLT].

"Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life." Those are powerful words. To the ancient Hebrews the heart was the inner person, your core values, your deepest thoughts and emotions. The things that

matter most to you. That's why it's so important to guard your heart. To maintain healthy relationships our hearts need healthy boundaries, boundaries that are open enough to let people in, but not so open that we lose ourselves. Let me say that again - to maintain healthy relationships our hearts need healthy boundaries, boundaries that are open enough to let people in, but not so open that we lose ourselves. I want to suggest to you that healthy boundaries are created when there's a healthy tension between two things: grace and truth. Let me explain what I mean.

Grace means giving people what they need whether they deserve it or not. Grace is what we receive from God. God endlessly pours out love and forgiveness and all good things into our lives, not because we deserve it but because it is God's nature to give. And as recipients of God's grace, we then extend grace to one another. We share life with one another. We open our hearts to one another. We listen to one another, we provide for one another and care for one another. Without grace relationships can't thrive, any more than flowers can bloom without sun and rain.

And then there's truth. Truth means being lovingly honest about my needs and limitations as best I can discern them. It also means being lovingly honest with others about their needs and limitations.

A healthy tension between grace and truth creates healthy boundaries in relationship. Let me give you an example from Jesus' life recorded in Matthew 19. A rich young man once came to Jesus and asked him what he needed to do to experience real life. After a brief conversation about obeying the commandments the young man said to Jesus, "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

The boundary Jesus exhibits in this story is one so many of us need to learn: Jesus loved the rich young man, but he didn't rescue him. He loved him enough to tell him the hard truth, but when the rich young man walked away Jesus didn't chase after him. He allowed the man to deal with the consequences of his own decision.

Some of us are driven to try to rescue others from the consequences of their choices, but more often than not that has more to do with our needs than theirs. Rescuing people from failure only limits their opportunity to learn and

grow, and sometimes it creates relationships of unhealthy dependency. Do you ever feel compelled to rescue people, to save them from their own choices? I see this happening in parenting relationships all the time, and it often hinders a child's ability to grow and develop resilience. Grace and truth, held in tension, create healthy boundaries for healthy relationships. We need to guard the hearts of others with healthy boundaries.

This is a really important topic, and I realize that we're only scratching the surface. Some of you may be realizing today that you need a little more depth to help you navigate healthy boundaries in difficult relationships. So, on the back of your bulletin today you're going to find a couple of book recommendations, along with the contact information of our spiritual care staff. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you need help with boundaries. You and your relationships are worth it.

Remember that conversation I told you about at the beginning of the sermon in which my friends wanted to join me and Nancy for dinner? My friends needed support. My wife needed time with her husband. Talk about tension! Not long ago I probably would have told my friends that they were welcome to join us, because I was afraid of disappointing them, and I knew that Nancy would eventually forgive me. And in the heat of the moment I would have forgotten that I have needs to. That's called a lack of boundaries.

But instead I remembered that my relationship with Nancy is the most important relationship in my life. And I really wanted and needed some one-on-one time with her. And so, I told my friend the truth...that I needed time alone with Nancy. And I extended grace by saying that I'd send a few dates in the future when we could all get together. I saw a little disappointment in his eyes, but in my heart I knew I'd made the right decision. I had balanced grace and truth, and guarded my heart.

Keeping your balance isn't easy. Don't believe me? Try standing on one foot for a while! And then remember that it's even harder to keep grace and truth in balance. But I want to leave you with a word of good news. Jesus is the perfect balance of grace and truth, and the Spirit of God is at work in us, transforming us in the very likeness of Christ.

I find hope in these words from Paul's letter to the Romans: So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.