

# The Balancing Act Of Marriage

## The TEN LAWS of BOUNDARIES

- The Law of Sowing and Reaping:** Our actions have consequences.
- The Law of Responsibility:** We are responsible to each other, but not for each other.
- The Law of Power:** We have power over some things; we don't have power over others (including changing people).
- The Law of Respect:** If we wish for others to respect our boundaries, we need to respect theirs.
- The Law of Motivation:** We must be free to say no before we can wholeheartedly say yes.
- The Law of Evaluation:** We need to evaluate the pain our boundaries cause others.
- The Law of Proactivity:** We take action to solve problems based on our values, wants, and needs.
- The Law of Envy:** We will never get what we want if we focus outside our boundaries onto what others have.
- The Law of Activity:** We need to take the initiative in setting limits rather than be passive.
- The Law of Exposure:** We need to communicate our boundaries to each other.

### Six Values:

**Value One-**Love of God

**Value Two-** Love of Your Spouse

**Value Three-**Honesty

**Value Four-** Faithfulness

**Value Five-**Compassion and Forgiveness

**Value Six-** Holiness

### Six Kinds of Conflict:

**Conflict #1:** Sin of One Spouse

**Conflict #2:** Immaturity or Brokenness of One Person

**Conflict #3:** Hurt Feelings That Are No One's Fault

**Conflict #4:** Conflicting Desires

**Conflict #5:** Desires of One Person Versus the Needs of the Relationship

**Conflict #6:** Known Versus Unknown Problems

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## Addressing Boundaries Issues in Marriage

When God created marriage, he gave us one of his best gifts. He provided a permanent and safe connection for a man and a woman to experience love, joy, meaning, and purpose together: *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh”* (Gen. 2:24).



Because marriage is such a wonderful type of relationship, confrontation within the marital relationship is very important. You are a central delivery system for grace and truth in your spouse's life, and vice versa. You have a responsibility to both care for and confront one another. You are an agent for change and growth in each other. Love does not blind either of you to the other's problems; in fact, love demands that you pay attention to them so that you can help resolve them.

Who is better qualified to understand and speak to someone about a problem than the person who is living life right next to him? You are intimately involved with him. You see the real person, imperfections and all. His ways and actions affect you; you are not dispassionate about him. More than anyone, a spouse should be able to see what her partner's true problems are.

The irony is that the very closeness of marriage partners makes confrontation more difficult. When two people pass through the idealizing honeymoon season and dive into knowing each other in day-to-day life, they see the problems, weaknesses, immaturities, sins, and eccentricities of the other person. And often, because of this awareness, a spouse will dismiss her mate's feedback and truth about her. It is as if she is saying, "Since I know you aren't perfect either, you have no credibility to confront me."

Therefore, building boundaries in marriage means that there can be built-in resistance from your spouse regarding the conversation. Utilize these guidelines to have a healthy confrontation:

### 1. Be the Best Spouse Possible

Though you can't be perfect, you do owe it to your mate to be the best "fit" that you can be. Sacrifice your comfort to his legitimate and appropriate needs and wants. Get into the growth process and learn to love and care about his life. Repent of and change whatever habits and patterns are bad for you, him, and the relationship. He is more likely to be open to hearing the truth from someone who is growing, involved, fun, and fully living life. People who are involved in the life of God stand a better chance of influencing their spouses than those who are standing on the sidelines of life.

# The Balancing Act Of Marriage

## 2. Appeal to the Relationship Itself

When you bring up a problem, let your spouse know that you are doing so because it affects you, her, and “us.” Here’s what a conversation might look like:

*You:* “I am not telling you this because I want to fix or change you. I want more closeness and good times with you, but this problem is like a boulder between us; I can’t get around it to get back to you. I want to get it out of the way so I can get back to us. The problem causes me to miss you.”

*Your spouse:* “You’re not being loving with me.”

*You:* “I’m sorry it feels that way, and I want you to know I love you. But I need to get back to the problem, because it really affects our relationship.”

## 3. Use Your History and Credibility

In marriage you have, in a way, earned the right to be heard. Without sounding superior, let your spouse know that you have been around him or her long enough to see the patterns you are concerned about. For example, say something like, “I am not basing this on one event. I have seen it happen many times over the past few months. I live with you, so it’s pretty clear what’s going on.”

In addition, use your “spousal equity” to bring up the effects of your mate’s behavior on you. Your lives are intertwined, so what he is doing most likely has a large effect on you. Make that part of the conversation. Go over the emotional, relational, and practical results of the problem.

## 4. Persist

If the problem you want to talk about has been going on for a while, chances are you will not get immediate results the first time you bring it up. Your spouse may be set in his or her ways. This is even more likely if your previous attempts at confrontation were poorly done. Your spouse may ignore you or react, hoping you will drop it. As a result, it is easy to fall prey to thinking, I brought it up, and it didn’t work, so that’s just the way it is.

However, a bad outcome is not cause for dropping the issue. If the problem is serious enough to hurt you, your spouse, and the relationship, it needs to be addressed more than once. Often the spouse doesn’t understand how strongly her mate feels until he goes to the trouble to bring it up again. Let your spouse know how strongly you feel about solving the problem by saying something like this:

*You:* “I know you aren’t comfortable with this topic. I’m not either. But it’s important enough to me that I will keep addressing it with you until it’s resolved one way or another. Is there another time we can talk, or another way we can talk about it that will be easier for you?”

*Your spouse:* “I don’t want to talk. It’s not my problem.”

*You:* “I know this is uncomfortable for you, but I have to insist that we talk sometime soon. What works for you?”

# The Balancing Act Of Marriage

## 5. Learn to Persist If You Feel Unable to Persist

You may find that persisting is difficult for you. Often, this has to do with a dread of conflict. You're not used to it, and you fear the possible repercussions. You had to work up a lot of courage even to bring up the problem. So when your spouse ignores it or gets defensive, you feel relieved to let it go. The despair and resignation are a little more tolerable than the anxiety.

If this is your situation, get outside help on confrontation. Use friends, a support group, or a mentor to help you work through your fears of telling your spouse the truth. Once you become more comfortable with the language of honesty, you will be more able to persist.

Persistence pays off.

## 6. Realize That Your Spouse Needs Something from You

Sometimes a spouse has problems with confrontation because he or she feels powerless and helpless. There is fear that words will have no effect: "She won't listen, I can't control her, I don't matter to her, why should she listen to me?"

This is often a misconception. The reality is that an out-of-control person is more likely to be very dependent on the spouse. This is because the spouse is often unknowingly enabling, rescuing and protecting the out-of-control mate from the consequence of her ways. He or she needs their spouse's responsibility, structure, acceptance, and other strengths. Without those things, he or she would most likely be in a lot of pain due to their behavior. The enabler is the strong one, though it doesn't look like it from the outside. Use this reality in your confrontation. If your mate is not responsive to you on the problem, say something like this:

*You:* "I don't think you are taking this seriously, and it's a serious matter. I really want you to change in this area. I have appealed to our relationship and to the possible hurt you are going to cause. But if this is not enough, I will need to start removing things in our relationship that you want and value. I don't want to, but if that is what it takes for you to take responsibility for your problem, I'm willing to."

*Your spouse:* "Go ahead, you're destroying us."

*You:* "I'm sorry you feel I'm doing that. It must be difficult to feel that way. But I want you to know that I am clear about what will happen next. Are you sure you won't reconsider?"

Be prepared to follow up, and use friends for support and feedback. However hard this may seem, we have seen many, many marriages transform and heal because a spouse was willing to set and keep a limit by removing something his or her spouse needed.

## 7. Be "Satisfiable"

If your spouse agrees to deal with the problem, be thankful and content that this particular goal has been reached. Let him know that if he stops doing something bad, or begins to do something good, you won't need to press for another boundary conversation on this topic.

Your spouse needs to know that you are "satisfiable." Otherwise, you run the risk of the other person becoming discouraged and giving up altogether.

# The Balancing Act Of Marriage

Today is the day to work on your own boundaries in marriage. The issues you take initiative to deal with will affect the rest of your married life. And the issues you ignore or are afraid to address will do the same.

## Questions for Reflection

1. When two people together take responsibility to do what is best for the marriage, love can grow. When they do not, one takes on too much responsibility and resents it while the other does not take on enough and becomes self-centered or controlling. What, if anything, do you see about yourself and/or your marriage when you look through the lens of the preceding statement?
2. Think about a current problem in your marriage. What can you do to take ownership rather than blaming your spouse? If you haven't already, state the problem in such a way as to reflect your ownership of it.
3. What issues in your marriage do you need to be dealing with? Put differently, what issues are you choosing to ignore or what are you afraid to address?

## Prayer

Lord God, I'm a bit nervous as I set out on this journey toward a healthier marriage, and I'm feeling more than a little vulnerable. I know that you will be with me each step of the way, and may your presence give me hope and the willingness to proceed. And, as I submit myself to your transforming touch, I ask you to be at work in my mate even as you work to make me more like Christ—in whose name I pray. Amen.