



Foundation Stone #4: Boundaries November 2005

The Nature of Personal Boundaries

Right about now is the time when ministries begin gearing up for the holiday season. Plans for Thanksgiving services, hanging of the greens, Christmas cantatas, ministry to the less fortunate, New Year's Eve alternatives – it's enough to make even ministers with the healthiest of boundaries feel a bit overwhelmed. This month's ministry article concerns the fourth Foundation Stone for long-term success in ministry: boundaries. If you don't have them, you're going to be in for a rather stressful holiday season.

What is a personal boundary, anyway? Webster's Dictionary defines a *boundary* as "something that indicates or fixes a limit or extent: specifically, a bounding or separating line, point, or plane." Cambridge Dictionary describes a boundary as "a real or imagined line that marks the edge or limit of something." Once you are better able to understand the purpose of physical boundaries, it will be much easier to understand the nature of personal and relational boundaries.

For example, every boundary in and around your home has an important purpose and function for you and your family. The external walls of your home serve multiple functions: they differentiate where the inside of your home ends and the outside of your home begins; they keep cold air out in the wintertime; they keep cool air *in* during the summertime; they keep your small children from running out into the street and protect them from potential predators. In general, here are a few of the more common purposes frequently seen for boundaries. A boundary:

- ✓ Defines where one thing ends and another begins
- ✓ Differentiates what belongs to you from what belongs to someone else
- ✓ Distinguishes what is your responsibility from someone else's responsibility
- ✓ Keeps good things inside the boundary (or allows good things to come inside)
- ✓ Keeps bad things outside the boundary (or removes bad things from inside)

Just as physical boundaries have common purposes that help people protect what matters most to them, personal or relational boundaries serve much the same purpose. In fact, you'll find properly applied personal boundaries not only have the benefit of protecting your values and what matters most to you, they may also help you stay focused on doing things that keep you living out your true Calling (Foundation Stone #2). Maintaining awareness of your personal boundaries just might be the key to significantly reducing your overall stress level this holiday season.

Thoughts to Ponder:

- What holiday activities do you typically perform that are actually *inconsistent with your true calling*? Can you allow *someone else* to take responsibility for them this year? Do they even need to be done... or can they simply be *let go*?
- What things *matter most* to you during the holidays (with ministry, family, etc.)? How can you create boundaries in your life *now* to ensure these healthy things will be prioritized and not squeezed out by the busy-ness of the season?
- Will you be tempted to take responsibility for things or events for which you should not really be responsible? Looking ahead, what personal boundaries (e.g. accountability, an honest conversation) might *prevent* this?

"Michael Todd" Wilson, MS, LPC
Director of ShepherdCare

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ShepherdCare • 2250 Satellite Boulevard, #230 • Duluth, Georgia 30097
(770) 623-3331 • www.PracticingShepherdCare.org