

“A Gift of Limits” (Philippians 2:5-8)

1. God Sets Limits

The other day, I watched a movie “Two for the Money.” One of the main characters says this, “Gambling addiction is not your problem actually. Your real problem is your limit, you put the limit how much you would bet. If you don’t have the limit, gambling will never be your problem.” Sounds really good, isn’t it?

But, in reality, we have limits. We all have limits. Even a super- rich person also has his limit. When we ignore our limit, we will have problems.

It's like what happened in the Garden of Eden. When God created Adam and Eve he set a limit. He said “You can eat from any tree but not this one. (Gen 2:16-17)” And what did Satan say? “Cross the limit! When you eat it, your eyes will be open and you'll be like God (Gen 3:5).” And something in as deep that wants to be like God. And we hate this limit thing and we get like crazy. So let's cross the limit.

When Adam and Eve crossed the limit, what happened? They started dominating others. They started controlling others, manipulating others. They started bullying others. They started getting aggressive. They started blaming and pouting.

God set the limits to protect us. God put boundaries in us. “They define what is me and what is not me.”¹ A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins. To understand your boundaries is to understand yourself. Your boundaries define your sphere. They clarify where you belong, and what is not part of you.

Henry Cloud says, “Boundaries give us a sense of what is part of us and what is not part of us, what we will allow and what we won’t, what we will choose to do and what we will choose not to do.”²

The easy way to understand boundaries is to look at our body.

¹ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries*, Zondervan, 1992, p.29

² Henry Cloud, *Changes That Heal*, Zondervan, 1990, 1992, p.125

“Our body has physical boundaries that define who we are... Our skin clearly defines where we begin and end.” It gives our shape. “Skin keeps the good in and the bad out.” It’s to protect us.³

Limits are one part of our boundaries. Just our body has physical boundaries by which shape us who we are, our lives have limits.⁴ We are not going to deal with all issues of boundaries, but focus on limits today. If you want to learn more about boundaries, you may read this book “Changes That Heal” written by Henry Cloud. It’s easy to read and bible based and practical. Highly recommended.

God has a purpose for each one of us. When we understand our limits, we can fulfill the purpose of our lives properly. When we clearly know our limits, then we know where to concentrate our efforts. When our boundaries are clarified, we are set free from the things that are outside of our limits. As a result, we can live out our full potential. Limits are a gift from God.

2. God Has Boundaries

God has boundaries. He has limit lines. It’s very clear if you look at Trinity. “The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one, but at the same time they are distinct persons with their own boundaries. Each one has his own personhood and responsibilities, as well as a connection and love for one another... God also limits what he will allow in his yard. He confronts sin and allows consequences for behavior. He guards his house and will not allow evil things to go on there.”⁵

“God is separate from his creation. He knows what is him and not him... He is a separate person from us. He can have relationship with us, but is not us, and we are not him... Because his will is separate from ours and we are two distinct people with separate identities, real relationship is possible.”⁶

God gave us a gift of limits when he created human-beings in his image.

³ Ibid., p.127

⁴ Ibid., p.145

⁵ Townsend, *Boundaries: When to say Yes say No*, <http://www.faithgateway.com/boundaries-when-to-say-yes-say-no/#.WpfmX-jFK02>

⁶ *Changes That Heal*, p.124

3. Jesus Knew His Limits

As a human, Jesus clearly understood his own limits.⁷

The temptation in the wilderness for Jesus was to cross the limits. Satan said, “Cross the limits. It’s Ok.” (Matt 4:1-11)

Jesus was human. This is about our humanity. Jesus was in a wilderness and had no food for 40 days! He was so hungry. Devil was tempting him. “Hey, Jesus. Turn these stones to bread!” You know Jesus could do it. It was a temptation to cross the line. “Think about it. If you just do it, you can save starving people. It’s not for you, but for people! Jesus, go ahead!” But Jesus listened to the Father, he followed the Father’s timetable, he obeyed the Father’s plan. He said, “No, no, I’m gonna wait.” He accepted the gift of limits, the limit from the Father.

In the second temptation, Devil takes him to the highest point in the holy city and encourages him to jump off, so that he can demonstrate he is special, he can prove he is the Son of God. “Go, Jesus. Let people see you. Let them know you are the Son of God. Be a special!” But he accepted his limit. He just accepts him as he is. He didn’t attract people, didn’t make any show for him.

In the third temptation, Devil let Jesus see all the earth, all kingdoms, and all glory, all praise, all honor. And he said, “All of them will be yours right now. I will give you all of them if you just bow to me once.” If Jesus cross this limit just a single moment then he can repent later, he can take back all people from Satan’s hand. He can save them. He can save the world in an instant. He can skip the suffering of the cross. The mission of God can be done so much quickly. But he resisted Devil. He accepts the limits.⁸

Jesus clearly understood his own limits. Therefore, he could resist temptation.

4. Danger of No Clear Limits

You can do the work of God, get out of God’s limits. But it will destroy you and your relationship.

⁷ Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*, Thomas Nelson, 2017. Kindle. Location 1443-8

⁸ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, Zondervan, 2003, 2010, p.144

The story of the Good Samaritan is a model of correct behavior in many dimensions. It is a good illustration of boundaries. Imagine for a moment how the story might read if the Samaritan were a no clear limits person.

The story starts like this. A man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. The robbers attacked him, stripped him, beat him, and left him almost dead. A priest and Levite passed by on the other side of the road, ignoring the hurt man, but a Samaritan took pity on him, bandaged his wounds, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day the Samaritan gave the innkeeper some money and said, "Look after him. When I return, I will pay you back for any extra expense you may have." (Luke 10:30-35)

Now let's think about the next part of the story.

The injured man wakes up and says: "What? You're leaving?"

"Yes, I am. I have some business in Jericho I have to attend to," the Samaritan replies.

"Don't you think you're being selfish? I'm in pretty bad shape here. I'm going to need someone to talk to. How is Jesus going to use you as an example? You're not even acting like a Christian, walking out on me like this in my time of need! Whatever happened to 'Deny yourself'? Don't you remember?"

"Oh, I guess you're right," the Samaritan says. "That would be uncaring of me to leave you here alone. I should do more. I will postpone my trip for a few days." So he stays with the man for three days, talking to him and making sure that he is happy and content.

On the afternoon of the third day, there's a knock at the door and a messenger comes in. He hands the Samaritan a message from his business contacts in Jericho: "Waited as long as we could. Have decided to sell camels to another party. Our next herd will be here in six months."

"How could you do this to me?" the Samaritan screams at the recovering man, waving the message in the air. "Look what you've done now! You've caused me to lose those camels that I needed for my business. Now I can't deliver my goods. This may put me out of business! How could you do this to me?"⁹

We may be moved with compassion to give to someone in need, but then this person manipulates us into giving more than we want to give. We end up resentful and angry, having missed something we needed in our own life. Or, we

⁹ *Boundaries*, p.38-9

may want more from someone else, and we pressure them until they give in. They give not out of their heart and free will, but out of compliance, and they resent us for what they give. Neither one of us comes out ahead.

People who has difficulty setting limits is the one who has the boundary problem. And people who don't respect other's limits also have boundary problem.¹⁰

Either ways, you will have a major trouble if you are not clearly aware of your limits.

5. Our Limits

Here I listed up our limits. I'm pretty sure that you can add more.

1) Our physical body. It's limited. Your body is decaying and one day it will turn to dust. You need sleep, that's the limit. You have to eat and drink. You have to breathe.

Some of us have very strong body. You can run so fast, you can jump very high, you can carry up a supper heavy stone, whatever you are able to do, there are still limits.

2) Our family. Our family of origin is a limit. There's limits for that your ethnicity, your culture, your race, your language, your country of birth. Those are all limits.

The quality of the family that is limited. No matter how great your family may have been, there are limits there.

There's also your marital status is a limit. If you're married it's a limit. If you're single it's a limit. If you have children it's a limit. If you don't have children it's a limit. What kind of children you have is a limit. Your marital status is the limit and you can't get around it.

3) Our personality. You have your attitudes, feelings, behavior, thoughts, desires, and so on. They define who you are. They belong to you. There's a limit line. For example, you are responsible for your own feeling, but you are not responsible for others feelings.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., p.49

¹¹ *Changes That Heal*, p.128-141

And our intellectual capacity has a limit. No matter how brilliant you are, you still have intellectual capacity limits.

4) Limits of material wealth. No matter how much wealth you have, there is a limit. If you don't manage it well, you will be short always.

5) Limits of all relationships. Jesus as humanity had limits of the people he could spend time with on earth relationally. He selected 12 from many disciples, and chose 3 from 12. It's the same for us. And how deep you can relate each other is limited. Whatever the reason is, our relationships are limited.

6) Of course time is a limit. I only have one life to live and I can't do it all. The enemy for doing the best is not doing "bad", but is doing good or doing the second best. We must budget our time. Otherwise it's very easy to run out of time because our time is limited.

This is just a little tip. If you are a task oriented person, you must be careful that you may just try any achievement so that you feel you are valuable, you are acceptable, you are lovable. If you are a people oriented person you must be careful that you may just want to please someone so that you feel you are useful, you are recognized, you are worthy to be loved. In both cases, you never have enough time to do enough things. And you always don't have time to do the best for you from God. Time is a limit.

7) And then finally how limited is my knowledge of God, my spiritual understanding. My experience of God is so limited.

6. Receiving a Gift of Limits

Receiving a gift of limits. Do you realize that this is the path of Jesus?

"When Jesus came to earth in incarnation, taking a form of human-being, He set aside certain rights as God, the Prince of heaven and accepted limits as normal human. He shared our limits, but He coped with them effectively—just as we must."¹²

¹² Gordon MacDonald, Location 1445

Can you realize what it meant for God to become human to embrace those limits?

For 30 years basically Jesus could be just anyone in the village of Nazareth. He served his parents, he helped his younger brothers and sisters, he worked at a carpenter shop. He was just an ordinary guy, he wasn't recognized, he didn't do any miracles. People suffered sickness and died in pain. There were people in need. But he just didn't move.

And he started his public ministries. He did some miracles but he still embraced limits as human. He was Jew. He spoke a certain language. He could stay only at one place at a time and he had to walk to next. Sometimes he was tired, he was hungry, he was thirsty.

Regularly he came to the Father, spent time with him alone. He listened to him and followed him. He understood his end was approaching, he had a special meal with his loved ones. He knew there was a limit in his time.

Jesus was just being in human flesh. What incredible power that took to embrace those limits for Jesus. He did it by the power of the Holy Spirit. And he didn't just accept them, but he surrendered them.

Philippians 2:5-8

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

Receiving a gift of limits. This is true faith. Because you leave the world in the hands of God. You're not trying to be God. You let God run the universe and the world. John the Baptist describes it the best: "A person can receive only what has been given him or her from heaven. (John 3:27)" What you and I have been given is from heaven: the place of fullness of God, the place of thankfulness, the place of delight and rest.

What does make you resist a gift of limits? What are you trying to achieve? What are you trying to prove? Whom are you trying to impress? What are you so anxiously striving for that you've lost your rest?

If you embrace and surrender and enter the joy of your limits, do you know what will happen to you? You will be set free from everything you think you have to do and all the things you feel you should do and all the demands you can't stop.

Receiving a gift of limits. This is a place of worship and rest. How would you like to rest in a world that knows no rest? How would you like to walk in a contentment and calmness and joy that the world knows nothing of?

And you're just a blessing to the world with your life regardless of what anybody else says about your life around you. Because you know that they don't know your limits, but only you and God do. And you choose to hug them and embrace them. You are fulfilling the purpose of your lives properly. You're living out your full potential. Limits are a gift from God.

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection:

1) Read Matt 4:1-11. During the 40 days of testing in the wilderness, the devil repeatedly tried to get Jesus to go beyond the limits the Father had set for him.

What are the limits?

In what way(s) is there spiritual warfare raging over your life around the issue of limits?

2) Share two or three significant limits God has placed in your life.

Instead of seeing these limits as our "enemies," how might they be our "friends" from God?

3) What does make you resist a gift of limits? What are you trying to prove? What are you so anxiously striving for that you've lost your rest?

4) In what way(s) is that more difficult than living out what other people, authorities, or the culture think you should do with your life?

Some are taken from "The Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Church Workbook", by Peter Scazzero, Zondervan, 2010, p.46, 48