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Presentation Transcript
Practical Parenting – Boundaries
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April 16, 2015

Humans are always reaching out, exploring, extending. We want to know how far we can go. We want to know our own limits. We want to know what we can accomplish – what we're capable of and, sometimes, what we can get away with. When we come home at night after work, and we're within the walls of our own home, there's something settling about this. "This is my domain, my space, my place, my family. We function best when our responsibilities are clearly laid out for us at work, at home, at church – wherever we are. When we know what's expected of us. It feels better. Knowing the edges of what's acceptable helps us feel secure and safe.

Sometimes these boundaries are provided by others. At other times, we join with others to create boundaries for the group or ourselves. It's natural and healthy to have reasonable, observable boundaries. Naturally, then, God has created boundaries for us. He knows what we need, because He made us. The Ten Commandments would be an example of some of God's boundaries. After we read them, we know how God expects us to treat Him and other people. They're the roadmap into relationship with Him and with others – very helpful. How would we know what God wants, except He tell us? How would we know how to worship Him, except He explain it to us?

Since the human family is patterned after God's family, we extend that and realize we need to establish boundaries in our families, as well. Children *need* to know what to do and not do to be successful in the family and with those outside the family, as well – and also with God.

I meet children occasionally who are quite outspoken, rude, sarcastic, inappropriately dressed, etc. These are children who, for the most part, are not trying to offend me, but simply don't know how to behave because they were never socialized properly. Of course, we all know who is responsible for that, don't we? It's parents who didn't care about their kids enough to do the hard work of socialization, or who weren't socialized themselves and don't know what to teach their children.

So let's look at a biblical revelation about God's boundaries for us. We can find it in Mark 12:28.

Mark 12:28 – *And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another. And seeing that He answered them well, asked Him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

So Jesus makes the connection between loving God and others and the Ten Commandments. The first four of them show us how to love God, and the last six show us how to love others. Godly love is at the core of the law of God. Those two principles are the most important part of the law. Let’s read on – verse 32.

V-32 – *And the scribe said to Him, “You are right Teacher. You have truly said that He is One and there is no other beside Him, and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as himself is much more than the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that, no one dared ask Him any more questions.*

The whole aim of the law of God – the real power and importance of it – is to teach us how to love one another and how to love Him. If we have, as a goal, to draw our children into loving relationship, then Godly boundaries need to be a part of our effort. Teaching our children how to express love in actions – how to show respect, how to refrain from judgment, how to live and let live – needs to be at the core of our approach in boundary setting.

Why would we want our fourteen-year-old to learn to do their own laundry, for example? Well, to show respect for the work mother and father do – to lighten their load, to contribute to the family, to enjoy having clean clothes, to feel the satisfaction of knowing how to be self-sufficient, to prepare for the time when they will be adults and be able to do all their own work and make all their own decisions.

Why do we all have dinner together on certain days of the week? Well, to stay in touch, to learn about the successes and trials of those we love, to enjoy each other’s company, to show respect for each other, to draw closer by spending time with one another.

Why is it that everyone in the family is expected to speak respectfully to every other member of the family? Well, to learn how to express differences in a respectful way, to learn to be non-judgmental toward others in every circumstance, to communicate love and respect to family members, to build bonds of closeness, to learn how to communicate love to one another in every circumstance.

Why are those who don’t know how to come in on time from weekend activities constrained by a curfew? Well, to learn how to be aware of their parents’ concern for them, to learn the fine art of being on time, to learn how to take care of their parents by not making them worry.

The boundaries are all set, pointing us toward how to love each other. I called that last point, *boundaries and love*. I'm going to call this next one, *love and boundaries*.

I met a nineteen-year-old – young woman – once who told me, when she was younger, her little brother was born with cerebral palsy. Back in those days, they believed that you needed to cross-pattern children with the right leg and the left arm at the same time – you know, like walking or crawling – and there needed to be hours spent on that. And that would help develop the brain's natural ability to cross-pattern and to develop better. So, her parents dutifully did that with her little brother – hours on end – all their spare time at home. And she remembered feeling very neglected by her parents. And she said, at one point in our discussion, "I'm not worth spanking." So she interpreted the lack of discipline and boundaries, that they failed to impose on her, as a lack of care.

Children know that they're a handful for parents. They know it takes huge effort on the part of parents to enforce boundaries on a family. When parents do not have, or do not enforce, or are inconsistent in enforcing boundaries, children take it as a lack of love on the part of their parents.

I was talking to a fifteen-year-old in my office some time back, and she was telling me that, unlike her, some of her friends were free to do whatever they wanted – stay out all night, skip school, skip doing homework, smoke weed – whatever they wanted to do. And I asked her why that was the case with their friends. And she said, "Because their parents don't care about them." I asked, "So, what does that say about your parents?" She said, "Well, I don't like all their rules, but I know they love me." And I said, "So, if parents show love to kids by setting reasonable rules, how do kids show love back to parents?" And this small smile slowly started to creep over her face, and she said, "I know. I should be more cooperative." And I said, "I bet if you would do that, at some point, they would be willing to listen to you on the areas where you don't feel their rules are fair. See, you're locked in this big tug-of-war with them, and you both feel like you have to keep pulling as hard as you can or you're going to get pulled over the line." She nodded her head as the wheels started to turn. So, when I talked to her parents, I told them about the tug-of-war as well, and that I was trying to convince her to give in a bit. And I said, "As leaders in the home, don't you think it would be good if *you* took the lead in that. You're setting the tone, not your daughter, so negotiate with her. Hear her out. Give something to get something. Give a little bit on the rule to get her in the habit of cooperating, for example."

In this case, the reason their daughter was resisting them so much was because they had drawn a line that is not developmentally appropriate for their daughter. They took her phone away from her six months earlier because she wasn't doing her evening chore to their satisfaction. When I quizzed her about it, in her mind, that was so long ago. She didn't even remember what she did to lose her phone. Her parents were also sensitive about the phone because she had inappropriately used it in the past and had gotten herself in some trouble. So they had grounded her from all her school and weekend social opportunities. They were wise enough to let her stay in school sports, which were really good for her. The reason she wasn't doing her chore properly was because she was angry with her father due to the way he incessantly nagged at her about everything he didn't like

about her. But at her age, peer interaction is crucial to her development. So he was taking away something from her that was helpful.

Because of this biological urge we have at that age, which they were interfering with, she was outraged by the rule, and she had dug in her heels and was resisting it and his disrespectful manner with her. She was so desperate, she took matters into her own hands, and surreptitiously got a phone from someone else, which she used to text friends. Once her parents found out about it, they became frightened that she might be misusing her phone again, but she had not been. She was just using it to communicate with her network of friends in a socially appropriate way. She learned her lesson about using the phone and was doing well with it. Her parents admitted to me that they were relieved that she was wasn't misusing the phone, but they still had not given her phone back because she had been deceitful.

Most of the time, when I encounter angry, deceitful teens, it's because parents are unaware of their teens' developmental efforts. This girl *needed* contact with people her own age. She chose a really bad way to accomplish that. But I just can't help but think that she wouldn't have done it, to begin with, if her parents knew a better way of dealing with her self-will and her developmental needs.

Her father told me the girl's brother was really compliant and helpful, while she was his "problem child." And I said, "So that proves the old adage that one approach to all kids doesn't work. Maybe your daughter needs a different approach than your son." At that point in time, I had made no progress with the father while he was coming to weekly coaching sessions. I got the impression that he thought his job was to teach me what he was doing, rather than learning a new way of doing things for himself. He was just like his daughter – stubborn to the core.

So how do parents deal with developmental issues appropriately? Well, one thing would be to spend some time with their children to keep up with them – to know where they are. And a second thing would be to get a good child development book. One that I love, love, love is an older book from the Giselle Institute, called *Child Behavior*.

Okay, now moving on, we usually think of boundaries as related to things we *aren't* supposed to do – things that disrupt the family, create problems at school, create life-threatening situations – you know, don't ride with drunk drivers, don't drive drunk, etc. But besides keeping children safe and happy, they're also put in place to teach children what to do.

When I was in the eighth grade, I was complaining to my mother that I needed more money to spend. And she said, "Get on your bike, go downtown to the newspaper office and apply for a paper boy's job." Well, I'd never been allowed to ride my bike that far myself before. So she changed the rule because she wanted me to extend out – to grow.

Some years ago, I had a fifteen-year-old who was burdened with a father who didn't love her the way he should – a lot of anxiety. She lived with her mother. Her mother told her, "You will take driving class and you will learn to drive," though she very much didn't

want to. “You will be allowed to go out and do things with groups of your friends. How often depends on how good you are at coming home on time and calling to let us know where you are and what you are doing.”

Let’s move to the last point for today – *boundaries and compliance*. Love is a motive to comply in a family where the parents draw the children into relationship. Isn’t that how Jesus is doing it with us? He sacrifices Himself for us, watches over us, gives us boundaries to live by. How do we respond? Well, we want to please Him. We want to show appreciation, live like He lives – to follow Him – become His servant.

Elaine and I watched an old movie recently called *The Robe*. Richard Burton, Victor Mature, Jane Simmons were in it, so you know it’s pretty old. It was about the Roman soldier ordered to carry out the crucifixion of Jesus. Of course, it was all fictional, but based...you know, historical fiction. This man watched Jesus asked God to forgive all the people that were involved in His murder. And hearing that changed this man’s life.

Of course, that didn’t really happen, but the people who wrote the script understood how it works. Sacrifice breeds respect. And respect follows the respected. That is why we spend time talking about the simple things we can do to communicate love to children. That underlying relationship causes compliance easily and naturally. It makes it easy for our kids to obey us.

Most of the time, when parents come to me with a resistant child, the emphasis in their mind is on getting them to do what their told – to comply with the rules. And the one big thing we tend to forget: it’s the *relationship* that’s the most important part, *not* the compliance. When parents are older, being to say, “My children were compliant,” fades when compared to, “My children loved me.” Of course, since boundaries and compliance are simply a way to express love, it’s all bundled together in the end, isn’t it? Loving parents create and enforce godly boundaries and well-loved and loving children comply with them.

But is love all that’s needed when dealing with children? Well, if it’s done well, from the very beginning, most of the time, yes! But what about the rest of the time? We’re going to talk about that in two weeks. We’re going to talk about *Consequences*, so don’t miss it.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.